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THE ROMANCE OF RELIGION



Montserrat. Overlooking a perfect cataract of rocks.

Frontispiece.]

The Romance of Religion

By

Olive Vivian

and

Herbert Vivian, M.A.

Author of "Abyssinia," "Tunisia," "Servia," &c.

WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

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SERVIA

THE POOR MAN'S PARADISE.

PREFACE

IT has been a source of great gratification to us, when we have written articles descriptive of Roman Catholic ceremonial, to receive compliments upon them from Roman Catholic friends. These have often told us that, while they could see at once that our standpoint was not theirs, we had yet written nothing to wound their slightest susceptibilities, that we had always displayed a reverent sympathy. A similar appreciation has been granted me by Archimandrites of the Orthodox Church, when I have made after-dinner speeches in Servian monas-

Preface

teries. To crown my delight, I only need to be complimented by a Dervish when my twenty-fourth chapter shall have been translated into Turkish.

The fact is, the line of demarcation in religion is not so much between Anglican and Roman, Orthodox and Copt, Muhammadan and Buddhist, as between the spiritual and materialistic in all religions. There have been various spokesmen of these two antagonistic points of view during the lapse of ages — Pharisee and Sadducee, Shiite and Sunnite, Catholic and Protestant—but the real issue has remained the same.

On the other side are bibliolaters, who make an idol of the Law of Moses or the Testament or the Koran, worshipping the letter and killing the spirit; the iconoclasts, whose handiwork may still be observed in many a noble fane, in England, in Germany, at Stambul; the enemies of music, painting, sculpture, incense, banners, processions, and every ceremonial adjunct to devotion; the

Preface

vulgarisers of religion, who will suffer nothing which their low intellects cannot understand : in a word, the materialists. They do not belong exclusively to any sect or denomination, though certain tenets undoubtedly foster their acidity of mind. They may even be found in the bosom of the Church.

On the other hand are those to whom religion is the highest expression of the senses : folk who seek to make all art, all beauty, all harmless pleasure a reverent adjunct to devotion ; who heed not the ridicule of the ignorant, but are content to dedicate themselves and all they have to the service of God.

The supreme test of any religion is the amount of happiness which it confers upon its believers. Now, your man of Puritan mind, whatever his creed, is gloomy, thankless, saturnine, unsympathetic. His only pleasure consists in denying pleasure to others ; his only joy lies in the reflection of his own superior austerity. I do not mean to say that austerity is necessarily a

Preface

bar to happiness. But there is austerity and austerity. The austerity of a devout monk is a mortification of the body, that of a Puritan is rather the stultification of the soul.

After all, the great contrast between the two points of view is mainly affected by the eternal struggle between authority and private judgment. Theology, like philosophy, is almost an exact science, and requires deep study, fortified by prolonged thought and the traditions of ages. It is as ridiculous for the man in the gutter to set up as a theological teacher as it would be for him to seek to promulgate new versions of astronomy or high mathematics. During long centuries, the greatest minds in the world have set themselves to perfect the shortest path to goodness and happiness. Every heresy has been an act of rebellion, which was bound to retard the spiritual advancement of the world. In a minor plane the same danger has been a frequent menace in political life, and the whole history of democracy shows how futile is the ambition of the vulgar to

Preface

manage public affairs for themselves. How much more incompetent, therefore, must they be to regulate the still more intricate administration of their spiritual life!

H. V.

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Contents

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER	
I. THE MIRACULOUS LITTLE DOCTOR	I
II. THE DANCE OF THE SEISES	16
III. A STRANGE MOUNT OF OLIVES	31
IV. THE MASKED MEN OF TUSCANY	44
V. A CITY OF NUNNERIES.	60
VI. WHERE WOMEN NEVER SPEAK	69
VII. THE VOTARIES OF ETERNAL SILENCE	84
VIII. MIRACULOUS IMAGES	101
IX. THE HOLY WEEK PROCESSION IN SEVILLE	112
X. THE PASSION PROCESSION AT MURCIA	128
XI. OUR LADY OF LUXEBURG	146
XII. AN OPERA IN A CATHEDRAL	157
XIII. THE PARDON OF S. ANNE D'AURAY	173
XIV. THE BLACK VIRGIN OF ROC-AMADOUR.	181
XV. THE HERMITS OF THE SIERRA MORENA	194
XVI. THE MARVELS OF MONTSERRAT	210
XVII. THE FANCY DRESS PILGRIMAGE OF WALCOURT.	233
XVIII. THE NIGHT OF THE REDEEMER AT VENICE	241

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. THE HOLY HOUSE OF S. IGNATIUS . . .	251
XX. THE HOLY COAT	262
XXI. THE CHURCH OF SERVIA	267
XXII. EASTER IN BULGARIA	277
XXIII. THE RELIGIOUS DANCE OF ETHIOPIA . . .	284
XXIV. CEREMONIES AT CONSTANTINOPLE	291

List of Illustrations

MONTSERRAT: OVERLOOKING A PERFECT CATA- RACT OF ROCKS	<i>Frontispiece</i>
PICTURES OF THE LITTLE DOCTOR'S CURES	<i>To face p.</i> 10
THE MIRACULOUS LITTLE DOCTOR	14
DANCING CHOIR BOYS	26
HARD AT WORK ON THE TROUSSEAU OF A FLEMISH COUNTESS	64
THE SUPPER REFECTORY	66
A PROCESSION OF SILENT NUNS	74
THE STRAW CHAPEL	78
IN THE CEMETERY	80
IN THE CLOISTERS	82
WELCOMING GUESTS	90
ADMISSION OF FOUR NOVICES TO FULL MEMBER- SHIP OF THE ORDER	92
THE WAKE OF A DEAD FRIAR	98
MIRACULOUS CHAPEL OF THE VOTIVE OFFERINGS	102
THE VIRGIN OF THE VALLEY	104

List of Illustrations

THE PRAYER IN THE GARDEN	<i>To face p.</i>	120
NAZARENE OF THE CONFRATERNITY OF OUR FATHER JESUS OF THE THREE FALLS	„	122
OUR LADY OF LUXEMBURG HOLDING THE KEY OF THE CITY	„	148
CHILDREN GO ABOUT AT NIGHT WITH LIGHTED TAPERS	„	154
ANIMALS DRESSED BY THE BUTCHERS AND ADORNED WITH FLOWERS AND RIBBONS	„	156
LEADING PERFORMERS, MARIES, AND ANGELS	„	164
AN OPERA IN A CATHEDRAL. THE APOSTLES	„	166
HOLY STAIRCASE WHERE PILGRIMS CRAWL ON THEIR KNEES	„	174
ROC-AMADOUR	„	182
GROTTO OF THE AGONY	„	190
OUTSIDE A HERMIT'S CELL	„	202
HERMIT DIGGING HIS OWN GRAVE	„	206
MONTSERRAT: PANORAMA FROM THE HERMITAGES	„	226
FANCY DRESS PILGRIMAGE OF WALCOURT	„	234
ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF S. IGNATIUS	„	252
THE NOVICES	„	258
DERVISHES	„	296

ROMANCE OF RELIGION

CHAPTER I

THE MIRACULOUS LITTLE DOCTOR

PERHAPS the most popular church in Rome is Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, the headquarters of the Friars Minor. And the Ara Coeli, interesting as it is in itself, owes its main popularity to the fact that it is the home of the Santo Bambino, or Holy Image of the Infant Christ.

The Bambino is a sturdy, rosy-cheeked little figure, said to have been carved many hundred years ago by a pilgrim at Jerusalem out of the

The Romance of Religion

root of a tree from the Mount of Olives. The weary pilgrim, it seems, slept over his task, but S. Luke appeared, and when the sleeper awoke he found the image miraculously completed and painted.

Many were the adventures of the Bambino, even in those far-off days. The ship in which the pilgrim sailed for Europe with his prize was wrecked, but when the holy man arrived in Rome loudly lamenting the loss of his treasure, he discovered, to his joy, that the Bambino had travelled faster than he. Fishermen had found it cast up by the waves at the mouth of the Tiber and brought it in triumph to the city.

Ever since that time the Santissimo Bambino has been held in reverence by the Romans, not only for its associations, but also for the miraculous cures it is said to work. Indeed, folks declare that at one time it received more fees than any physician in Rome, and to this day its pet name is the "Little Doctor."

The Miraculous Little Doctor

The Ara Coeli Church stands at the top of the Capitol, on the site of the famous Temple of Jupiter, where triumphal processions took their way and victorious generals offered up thanks to Jove. It is one of the oldest of the Roman churches, and dates from the sixth century. The outside is remarkably ugly, but the 124 great marble steps which lead up to it impart an imposing grandeur. These, like most of the materials of the church, were torn from a heathen temple and erected by a Roman prince. It was in this church nearly a century and a half ago that Gibbon, whilst listening to the barefooted friars singing vespers, first conceived the unholy idea of writing his "Decline and Fall."

The Bambino is kept in the sacristy, jealously guarded, except for the days between Christmas and the Epiphany. If you pass the foot of the Capitol on the 6th of January you will see the great marble staircase crowded with every kind of person—priests and peasants, soldiers and citizens—all on their way up to pay homage to the

The Romance of Religion

Bambino, who then emerges from his sanctuary and takes up his residence in his own special chapel. Of course, the greater proportion of his visitors are children, and to tempt them artful toy-sellers spread their wares on the steps and drive a roaring trade during those ten days. These vendors have the funniest little woolly sheep, green trees, oxen and asses, and thatched stables in their collection; besides wax figures of the Santissimo Bambino. These are for the *crèches* that Italian children love to set up in their homes. The little ones save all their centesimi to buy toys representing the flight into Egypt, and those who can boast of large flocks of furry sheep and forests of trees are regarded with the most lively envy by their playmates.

As you go higher up the steps, the character of the toys becomes more and more devotional. Whilst at the gates below you may even buy such frivolous things as dolls' cups and saucers, looking-glasses, &c., up above, on the wide platform outside the church, there are the more

The Miraculous Little Doctor

serious merchants who deal in highly-coloured pictures of the Bambino, the Virgin, and the Saints, as well as roses and crucifixes. Here the peasant from the Campagna lays in her stock of medals and books of devotion for the year.

The beggars, of course, are very hard at work, and rattle their tin cans threateningly at you as you enter. Nuns are on their way to the church to look after their little charges, for during the "Little Doctor's" festival children are allowed the curious and unique privilege of preaching in the church! Their sermons are, of course, prepared for them by a friendly priest or nun, and great is their joy and that of their parents when they are allowed into the impromptu pulpit.

Some of the children are distinctly saucy outside the church, although they control their overflowing spirits somewhat when they venture inside. I am convinced that Darwin's theory is not far wrong as far as Italian small boys are concerned, for they have every monkey-like trick.

The Romance of Religion

Especially when they catch sight of a camera will they instantly strike the most ridiculous and exaggerated attitudes imaginable.

The great doors of the church are only open during these ten days, and all the rest of the year you must find your way in by some little side portal. On the left of the aisle there is a great glow of golden light. Here is the chapel of the Presepio, or Manger (closed all the rest of the year by big white and gold doors), where the Bambino holds his court. Crowds of children, peasants, and shepherds from the Campagna and adorers from every corner of Rome assemble before the highly-coloured tableau, arranged like a miniature theatre in the chapel. There are the Magi bearing gifts—coloured wooden figures as large as life. Bethlehem is seen in the distance; and the ox and the ass are peacefully crunching corn. A dazzlingly white and delightfully woolly lamb gambols about, and S. Joseph looks on contemplatively. But the cynosure of every eye is

The Miraculous Little Doctor

the figure of the Blessed Virgin elaborately decked out, and holding on her lap the Santissimo Bambino, literally blazing with jewels.

Just opposite is a quaint and curious little scene. On a platform rigged up for the occasion, and draped with a bit of red stuff, stands a small girl, leaning against a pillar brought from Egypt in the days of Cleopatra. She is rather shy, and has induced a little peasant friend of hers to come up with her and encourage her. Round the pulpit stand a group of children, who listen attentively while she tries to explain to them the story of the flight into Egypt. Alas! she does not get on very well, and her audience very soon become impatient, insisting that some one else shall take her place. A little peasant, with a gay-coloured handkerchief tied over her head, slips quickly into the breach. She is not an atom shy, and although she cannot be more than eight or nine years old, she prattles glibly on about the Santissimo Bambinello. How very, *very* holy he is, and so tiny

The Romance of Religion

and young!—and as she expounds she points to the Presepio opposite.

Much as they love the little Bambino, it is always the Virgin who claims most of their sympathy. The tears start to their eyes and they shudder dramatically as they talk of the poor, *poor* Madonna, and what suffering she must go through later on. Suddenly, in the midst of a sermon, the little preacher will drop on her knees, clasp her hands, shut her eyes tight, and murmur a prayer. Then all at once up she bobs again and resumes her discourse with renewed vigour.

The girls are very much more self-possessed than the boys, who generally forget everything they meant to say and stand smiling vacantly at their audience. Their fond relations then endeavour to encourage them, and they make a few lame efforts, which are greeted with hoots and often laughter from the crowd. Thereupon their composure gives way and they disappear in tears like a Jack-in-the-box, whilst their mortified

The Miraculous Little Doctor

parents often relieve their feelings by boxing their ears on the spot.

Lo, a little girl dressed up in a big muslin veil and artificial roses, that she may figure in the procession of the Bambino round the church. A very pretty child, with great dark eyes modestly cast down. She seems so shy that it is difficult to get a word out of her, but directly she ascends the pulpit she becomes as bold as a lion, and rants and raves like the most enterprising Methodist minister. I thought her voice would crack as she shrieked and wept over the woes of the Madonna, and she almost overbalanced herself as she waved her arms about and pointed dramatically to the Bambinello.

On the day of the Epiphany the Bambino returns to the sacristy, but before he is taken away from the church there is a great procession round the building. The officiating prelate deposits him solemnly on the altar and kisses his feet, whilst the whole congregation fall on their

The Romance of Religion

knees. Then a very curious ceremony takes place. The steps and the square at the foot of the staircase are packed with a dense and excited crowd, and the priest brings the Bambino to the platform outside the church. There is a great uproar, bands play and flags are waved. Then the priest holds the image high above his head, and turning it towards the north, the south, the east, and the west, he blesses the four quarters of Rome in the name of the Bambino.

On a wall close to the Presepio Chapel are a number of curious *ex-voto* pictures, very weird both in conception and execution. There are pictures of people falling out of windows who have been saved miraculously. Others represent people seemingly being ground to powder by the hoofs of enraged quadrupeds, presumably horses. Cabmen are generally the donors of these works of art, and if the artist may be believed, some of the escapes must indeed have been miraculous.

Let us now visit the Bambino at home in the sacristy. He is guarded with the utmost care, for



Pictures of the Little Doctor's Cures.

[To face p. 10.

The Miraculous Little Doctor

a story is told how once the Franciscans were robbed of their treasure. A sick woman, having heard of the marvellous cures of the Bambino, thought she would like to have so wonderful a doctor always with her. So she induced the monk who brought the image to her house to leave it with her a few days. In the meantime she had it exactly copied, and when the monk came back to fetch it he was given a false image dressed up in the Bambino's clothes and jewels. That night the Franciscans were awakened by furious knocking at the great church door and by a pealing of bells. They rushed down, and could just distinguish one tiny pink toe showing beneath the door. When they opened it they found the poor little Bambino, without a stitch of clothing on, shivering outside. Since that time his guardian never lets him out of his sight.

The priest who has charge of the sacristy at the present day enjoys a great reputation for sanctity. A sister, who was there one day pray-

The Romance of Religion

ing, explained to me that he used to be one of the ordinary begging friars of very lowly origin. He was so holy, she said, that the Bambino used to talk to him. One day it told him that he must prepare himself for the priesthood. "How can I become a priest?" said the friar; "I have had no education." "No matter," said the Bambino, "go and tell your superior you must be ordained priest. I and my Divine Mother will occupy ourselves with your education." For a long time, however, the friar did not dare to confide in his superior, but when he did so the superior bowed to the Bambino's decision, and the friar was ordained priest.

The Bambino is kept in a gilt case with glass sides, and the preparations for unlocking the doors of the recess in the wall where he is kept are very elaborate. The candles are first lighted on the altar below the recess; the doors are then solemnly unlocked, and the priest takes two ropes in his hand from a little metal box in the centre of the altar.

The Miraculous Little Doctor

As he pulls these the doors glide back, and the Bambino comes sliding forward in his case. When the devout catch sight of the image they fall on their knees murmuring prayers, and some prostrate themselves, touching the ground with their foreheads.

One day when I was present in the church a tiny child was brought to be healed. The family ranged themselves before the little altar, and the priest with much ceremony put on his stole, said a prayer, and solemnly opened the gilt case. He held the Bambino out to everybody in turn, and each one kissed its foot and pressed his forehead to it. Then the Bambino's foot was placed against the sick baby's mouth and forehead.

The Bambino goes out sometimes three or four times a day to visit sick patients. The case in which he travels is very gorgeous, lined with white satin and elaborately embroidered. In it are a cushion and satin coverlet. Just behind the case we may see a

The Romance of Religion

picture of the Bambino being taken to visit a sick man. The acolyte stands at the foot of the bed, holding up the image for the invalid to gaze on. Beside the enormous collection of silver hearts of every size and shape given by those who owe to the Bambino their restoration to health, there is also a quaint silver picture of a miraculous cure.

Some people say that the Bambino is less popular in Rome than he was, for Italians always reverence pomp and magnificence, and the poor little Bambino has been sadly shorn of his splendour during the last fifty years. At the beginning of the century he was treated as a prince, had his own civil list, and up to 1849 possessed his own stables, carriages, and horses. In 1848, when the Pope was chased from Rome, the people chose out the most splendid of his coaches and presented it to the Bambino. It is said that when Pius IX. returned again he felt scruples at taking back what had been offered to God. Nowadays, however, the Bambino does



The Miraculous Little Doctor.

[To face p. 14.]

The Miraculous Little Doctor

not possess any carriage of his own, and those who wish to see him must send one. Now the precious image passes by unrecognised, but in old days every one knew when it was coming, for it drove out in state like a prince, and, as its attendants held it up at the windows, the crowds on either side fell upon their knees.

CHAPTER II

THE DANCE OF THE SEISES

ONE of the special sources of ridicule in the proceedings of the Salvation Army has been its adoption of the dance as a religious exercise. But we should only prove our ignorance by seeking to deny that the religious dance has almost as ancient an origin as any other form of religious ritual.

Every savage who can boast of any sort of creed includes a dance among his devotions to his deity. The Egyptians, the Romans, the Greeks, all danced, as much as they prayed in honour of their gods. And, after all,

The Dance of the Seises

if the Supreme Being is the type of harmony and music is admitted as an accessory to worship, why exclude the dance? It is certain that the early Christians took this view. S. Basil urged his disciples to dance on earth in order to fit themselves for what he conceived was one of the chief occupations of the angels in heaven. Many bishops used to lead the holy dance round their altars. A tradition, supported by an apocryphal gospel, asserts that, after the Last Supper, the Apostles joined hands and danced round our Lord, the which, according to Jewish customs, is by no means unlikely.

The propriety of the religious dance was hotly contested at various epochs in the history of the Church. A council prohibited the practice in 692, but it was still very general in 1617. S. Augustine was against it, but S. Chrysostom took part in it. In the sixteenth century the dance was accompanied by a solemn game of ball in many French churches, and in 1683 it was the duty of the senior canon

The Romance of Religion

to lead a dance of choir-boys in the Paris Cathedral.

Nowadays the custom has almost died out, though where it has survived it is held in very high consideration. The Abyssinian Church still adheres to it: there is a popular procession of pilgrims at Echternach, in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, every year; but the most picturesque and celebrated is undoubtedly the dance of the Seises, which takes place in Seville Cathedral three times a year—during the octaves of the Immaculate Conception and Corpus Christi, and at Holy Week.

A legend attributes the origin of the dance of the Seises to an incident at the time of the invasion of the Moors. The priests of Seville Cathedral, having been warned of the danger, were engaged in removing the Host and concealing various holy images and precious jewels. A band of Moors, who had been dispatched to loot the cathedral, paused to watch a country dance which was being executed outside by a

The Dance of the Seises

number of children. These, realising the importance of every instant of delay, went on dancing with all their might, forgetting their alarm and their weariness, and thus the priests obtained a respite, which enabled them to secure their treasures. When better times came it was determined to perpetuate a religious dance in the cathedral in commemoration of this incident. From time to time sober prelates have sought to discontinue the dance, but it has struck so deep a root in the hearts of the Sevillians that it has contrived to survive every censure and every obstacle.

I enjoyed the privilege of witnessing this unique dance several days in succession, during the octave of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and I shall always look back upon it as one of the dreamiest and most fascinatingly fantastic scenes I have ever beheld. Seville Cathedral is in a chronic state of restoration. Just now the high altar, in front of which the dance has been held from time

The Romance of Religion

immemorial, is surrounded by planks and rubbish heaps, where I have seen workmen lounging about with cigarettes in their mouths. All the cathedral services are therefore transferred to a large side chapel, known as the Sagrario, which does duty as parish church. This is large enough for an imposing display and the accommodation of a numerous congregation, about which the less said the better.

The ceremony is looked upon too much as a sight, and besides heretic tourists, who may be expected to jostle and giggle anywhere, there are fat women in mantillas who bark the shins of the devout with their camp-stools, and ubiquitous street urchins who fight their way to the front, with yells of laughter, burrowing through legs and scattering petticoats. When I entered, the Psalms were being chaunted in the carved stalls of the choir at the back of the church. I made my way diplomatically up to the rails of the altar, where a youth in a surplice was engaged in kindling the sixty-four large candles, which soon

The Dance of the Seises

emitted a blaze of light rendered all the more effective by the reflection of the silver reredos and countless silver images. At the back and sides of the altar were immense crimson curtains with white stripes of gold galloon, reaching right up to the roof, and heightening the effect of the brilliant altar with its magnificent blue cloth, richly embroidered with gold. A few sumptuous cushions of blue and gold brocade were dotted about within the rails, and there were two rows of benches, draped with crimson and gold, facing each other immediately in front of the altar. A row of huge silver candlesticks, with candles over five feet high, guarded the altar-rails; but the body of the church was shrouded in dim, religious darkness, which, as at a theatre, rendered the great spectacle all the more conspicuous and impressive. It would be impossible to conceive a more imposing effect.

Various ecclesiastics—mostly clad in violet—emerged from a door near the back of the altar, and made their way solemnly down to the

The Romance of Religion

choir, kneeling, as they passed, to the Host, which was set up in a gold monstrance above the image of Our Lady upon the altar. Among them was the Cardinal Archbishop of Seville, a divine of surprisingly youthful appearance, with a scarlet train eight yards long. Then came the thurifers, clad in cloaks of faint, mysterious colours, and of exceeding softness and thickness. A huge hood hung down to their waists, which were girt with long silken cords. The incense was kindled ; great gusts of blue smoke formed above the censers, broke gently into exquisite grey curls, and immediately diffused themselves, as if by magic, into that penetrating perfume which overpowers the senses by a veritable odour of sanctity. Surely no accessories could be more perfect for the dramatic, yet essentially religious, performance which was about to take place!

Two monster silver candlesticks were now borne in by youths in red, who held them before the altar with a motion as of presenting arms, and then carried them off to the sides. Then the

The Dance of the Seises

heavy red curtains on the north side of the altar were drawn back, revealing the desks and seats of the orchestra. Two of the seis boys were grouped beside the conductor in the most artistic attitudes imaginable, and looked amazingly dreamlike through the incense in the dim light. Slowly the musicians assembled, just as in a theatre, lounging, gossiping, twanging their stringed instruments to bring them into tune. The conductor was a typical Spanish priest, all shaven and shorn, ruddy, with deep lines around the mouth and eyes.

At last the performers filed in—two rows of five from either side of the altar; they made slight genuflections, and ranged themselves on their knees in two rows before their benches. As the clergy streamed up from the choir and took their places within the rails—the archbishop on his throne, the others wherever there was a vacant space—I had ample opportunity to study the boys and their costume.

There were ten of them. The word seis

The Romance of Religion

means six, and refers to the six principal boys, who enjoy the title and emoluments of Seises, the four others ranking merely as supernumeraries. All were dressed in blue¹ silk coats with wide stripes of gold galloon and puffed sleeves of Philip and Mary's period; short little capes, which twirled about vigorously in the movements of the dance; laced collars; streamers at the back of the arms; scarves across the breast; white silk shoes and stockings. Under their arms they carried blue hats with white feathers, adorned with gold galloon and having the brim turned straight up in front—almost the fashionable lady's hat of the present day. One might have thought it a ballet of young cavaliers in an opera.

The organ struck up the overture of the sweet, simple seis music, as if to give the keynote. Almost before the last sound had died away, the orchestra of stringed instruments took up the tune, and a number of priests in outdoor dress,

¹At Corpus Christi the blue is replaced by red throughout the costume.

The Dance of the Seises

crowded at the north end of the altar, began the strange, old-world song of the Seises. It is almost impossible to give an idea of the character of the music in words, but I have succeeded, with some considerable trouble, in obtaining the score,

INTRODUCTION.

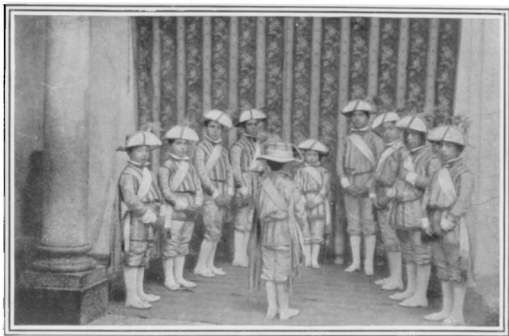
The musical score is written for piano and consists of three systems of staves. The first system is labeled *Andante.* and features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a harmonic accompaniment. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system concludes the introduction with a final cadence. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C).

which has never been correctly or completely published. It is certainly not the usual con-

The Romance of Religion

ception of sacred or even of classical music. Still less is it, as I heard an ignorant Yankee in the crowd protest, a variety jingle. Perhaps the nearest approach we know is to be found in an opera comique as opposed to an opera bouffe. This, however, gives a very poor idea of its character, for it is in reality the typical accompaniment of the mediæval mystery plays—tender yet cheerful, simple but affecting, and at all times bewildering. It must be heard a great many times in order to be understood.

It was striking enough upon the organ, but when the violins and voices began, it was almost uncanny. While the priests sang the boys stood in two rows facing the altar, with their feathered hats under their arms. Then the priests ceased and the boys took up the strain. Their voices were often unpleasantly shrill and even out of tune, but their gorgeous surroundings and fantastic appearance would have carried a far less perfect performance through; it was all more or less minor, yet the vivacity predominated over the



Dancing Choir Boys.

[To face p. 26.]

The Dance of the Seises

pathos, and the general effect was inspiring rather than melancholy. There were abrupt alternations from *forte* to *piano*, and one noticed various little tricks of voice which showed that they had been very carefully trained.

After the singing had proceeded for some little while the boys all made a little bob to the altar, and, turning round facing each other, proceeded to put on their hats, adjusting the elastic at the back with some care. Then they began to sway to and fro very gently, still singing, and insensibly the dance began. It would be wearisome to describe all the figures, though it was anything but wearisome to look on. The dance may best be described as a sort of pavane, and it called up vague recollections of the minuet. One step, two steps, very slowly forward, until the two rows closely faced each other; then one boy at each end executed a pirouette and swept away, while the others danced back to their original positions, forming a kind of square. The pirouetting was, perhaps, the most graceful part of the perform-

The Romance of Religion

ance, executed with boyish vigour, and sending capes and streamers flying in the air. They certainly kept better time with their feet than with their voices.

Presently they began to use their castanets, not with the professional rat-tat-tat clap of the Sevillian *flamenco*, or gipsy-dancer, but with a rippling sound far more appropriate to the rhythm. Now the dance grew faster and more varied—a *chassé-croisé* was succeeded by a circular figure, in which the dancers followed each other round and round, swaying their bodies as they rattled their castanets, and sang rhymed couplets to “the glory of Mary and her Conception, her Con-, her Con-, her Conception,” in the soft, slovenly accent of Andalusia.

The finish was abrupt and uneventful, like the end of a speech without a peroration. It was as though the conductor or the archbishop had suddenly grown tired of the performance and given the signal to conclude it. The boys doffed their cavalier hats and sank upon their knees, the

The Dance of the Seises

organ struck up what seemed a continuation of the seis tune, and the sightseeing portion of the congregation fought for the doors. But there still remained an impressive exhibition, well worth remaining to behold. As the priests to the north of the altar renewed their chant, small curtains on either side of the Host began to move slowly, almost imperceptibly, along a semicircular wire.

No hand could be seen at work, and it needed but a small stretch of the imagination to fancy that a miracle was in progress. At first the curtains moved no faster than the minute hand of a clock, but as they advanced it became almost possible, by watching them very closely, to detect their motion. Meanwhile the whole congregation fell upon their knees in adoration, and the singers cast furtive glances to watch for the final eclipse of the Host by the closing of the curtains.

At last they met and the music ceased as if by enchantment, frozen in the middle of a word and a bar. A few prayers followed; the arch-

The Romance of Religion

bishop rose, made the sign of the cross in bestowal of his blessing; and a canon advanced to announce that all who had been present to the end were entitled to an indulgence of eighty days by order of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII.

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE MOUNT OF OLIVES

I WONDER how many people if asked in which country Constance lies would be able to answer correctly. I am quite sure that nine-tenths of them would promptly reply that it is in Switzerland, whereas it really forms part of the Grand Duchy of Baden, and is accounted one of the brightest jewels of the Grand Ducal coronet.

Constance is a city that hardly receives its full share of attention from the tourist, and its beautiful lake is shamefully neglected for the lakes of Geneva or Lucerne. And, of those who do visit Constance, few know

The Romance of Religion

that close by is one of the most curious chapels in all Europe. Indeed, no one should fail to make a pilgrimage to the marvellous Oelberg, or Mount of Olives, at Kreuzlingen.

Though in Constance you are in Germany, still you must cross the border to reach Kreuzlingen, and you will not have driven far out of the south gate of the town before a Swiss Custom House official starts up, like a Jack-in-the-box, out of a small house by the wayside and peremptorily stops your cab to find out whether you are conveying taxable goods into his fatherland. However, he is good enough to dismiss both your cab and your camera with the same airy wave of the hand, and you drive on with a light heart into the land of Tell. All the way along the road to Kreuzlingen, on either side, are pretty villas of all sizes, each in its neat little garden, with its grass plot as green as an emerald, and the beautiful rose-bushes, trailing clematis, and festoons of creepers, for which Constance is so famous. At last you draw up before a great church, standing

A Strange Mount of Olives

back from the road behind a handsome wrought-iron railing, and behold there the chapel you have come to see.

Kreuzlingen is said to derive its name from the fact that the Bishop of Constance of a thousand years ago made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and there acquired a fragment of the True Cross. This he bequeathed to a body of pious souls, who had given themselves up to good works, the men to teaching the faith, and the women to tending the sick. The spot where they established themselves was then called Crucelin in honour of the Cross, and thence the present name Kreuzlingen is derived. During the Swiss war of independence and the Thirty Years' War this fragment is said to have had the most hair-breadth escapes from the Protestant enemy, and its fame proportionally increased.

The church is attached to the abbey buildings which are about two hundred and fifty years old, but of far remoter origin. Before the Thirty Years War both abbey and church were situated much

The Romance of Religion

nearer the city of Constance. However, one of the Swedish generals in Gustavus Adolphus's army made the place his headquarters whilst besieging Constance, and in the course of many a fierce fray the abbey suffered so much that it was deemed better, at the close of the war, to rebuild it, and the present site was chosen in preference to the old.

When the new church was finished the relic was deposited in a place of honour on the high altar, but it was not until a hundred years later, in the middle of the last century, that the reigning abbot, whose name was Donderer, conceived the idea of erecting a particular chapel for the relic itself. He decorated this chapel with a representation of the Mount of Olives, intended to tell the story of our Lord's Passion. The relic was enclosed in a beautiful silver cross, adorned with precious stones, and placed in its new shrine. However, at the dispersion of the monasteries this cross was sold, and the relic placed in a plainer and less costly one. It is now kept in a room

A Strange Mount of Olives

attached to the church, and exposed to the view of the faithful on great feast days only.

As you enter the church a friendly woman, armed with a big bunch of jingling keys, comes to meet you, and offers to open the great iron-work gates that stretch across the chapel, and cut it off from the rest of the church. At first the effect is rather bewildering to the eye. The great crucifix in the centre dominates the whole scene, and below it is the Mount of Olives. This consists of a kind of plaster erection, painted a pale greenish-grey colour, to represent a rocky, semicircular hill, honeycombed with many caves, and with here and there what the artist imagined to be a Roman palace or Jewish room let in. Crowds of little figures, about fifteen inches high, climb up or down the mountain, or stand about in groups.

There are in all three hundred and twenty-five figures, carved in wood of a reddish-brown colour. It is not thought that they can all be the work of the same artist, although some

The Romance of Religion

say that they were carved by a Tyrolese sculptor, who spent eighteen years over his tremendous task. Most people, however, are agreed that more than one hand was responsible for these marvellous figures. Connoisseurs even claim to be able to trace at least four different styles, besides several figures that act as connecting links between the principal groups, and seem to have been added later.

The chapel was commenced by the Abbot Donderer in 1761, and he was seized with a lively desire to beautify the abbey. He intended also to erect a similar chapel on the opposite side of the church representing various scenes from the childhood and life of our Lord, but he died before he could carry out the plan. He bought the carvings on the Oelberg from a Constance merchant named Jacob Hofner. They were then valued at 4,000 florins, and the conditions of payment were that the abbey should provide the vendor weekly with a sufficient quantity of bread and meal for his use during twenty years.

A Strange Mount of Olives

To be appreciated thoroughly, the groups should be examined separately. Behold the entry into Jerusalem: the disciples and followers of our Lord are carrying palms, whilst others are spreading their garments in the way. The artist has allowed his imagination to run away with him somewhat in modelling the ass, for he gives it the shape of a horse and endows it with a luxuriant mane and tail. Indeed, if it were not for those unmistakable ears we should not dream that he could have intended it for an ass, but rather conclude that he had a new interpretation for S. Mark's description, which speaks of "a colt."

Another group includes several scenes. In the centre there is the Last Supper, which is being instituted by our Lord, His hand raised in benediction. The different expressions on the Apostles' faces are very well done, and their hands are outstretched in various gestures of reverence and adoration. They sit round a long table, each with his platter before him. Just

The Romance of Religion

above the Last Supper we see our Lord betrayed by the kiss of Judas, and the soldiers approaching to bind Him; while a little farther on Peter is standing, his sword drawn, bending over Malchus, whose ear he is just going to strike off.

Presently we see Christ deserted by all His disciples and led away toward Jerusalem. A soldier goes on ahead, bearing a very modern-looking lantern. The artist gives rein to his fancy in the dress of the soldiers, for they date from every age. Some are of his own period, whilst others are clothed in skins, and their headgear is peculiarly marvellous. Our Lord follows behind, and two men armed with clubs are urging Him on.

Then we find our Lord bound and dragged along by the soldiers. His expression of Divine resignation, His drooping figure, and patient look are beautifully portrayed. Just behind is a half-clad ruffian, with his club raised to strike. The figure of the soldier with the flag is a little

A Strange Mount of Olives

masterpiece, and his attitude of command, with arm outstretched, is quite admirably expressed. The one on the left side of our Lord might almost have stepped out of the army of Frederick the Great, and, indeed, is not unlike that king, with his little tight curls and sharp, wizened face. The costume resembles that of the eighteenth century far more than the first, and the cap might well belong to a Prussian soldier of that day.

Then comes a very quaint representation of S. Peter's denial. In the lower part of the group we see the Apostles standing round the fire with the servants in the hall of the high priest. The maid is accusing him of having been with Christ, and he is denying the assertion with great energy. Just above, the cock is perched on a rocky crag, while S. Peter, in an agony of self-reproach, has sunk down on his knees and implores pardon from God.

A very striking group depicts Christ brought for the first time before Pontius Pilate. In this

The Romance of Religion

the figure of our Lord is less good, nor is it a happy idea to place Him with His back to the governor. There is something very wooden and lifeless about the figure, and it seems as if it were only steadied by the rope which is held by one of the soldiers. On the other hand, Pilate and those surrounding him seem almost to breathe. The governor sits on a beautifully carved throne in a regal attitude. On either side of him are two lictors with fierce faces. Their monkey-skin caps, with the ape's head resting on their foreheads, are distinctly original, and give them a delightfully barbaric appearance. The chief priests and elders, in a state of fury, are accusing our Lord and saying, "He stirreth up the people." The figure of the high priest, who is shaking his finger in Pilate's face, is perhaps the best in the whole collection.

Next we discover our Lord brought before Pilate for the second time. The Roman governor is in his robes of State, with a big umbrella carried over his head after the fashion of Eastern potentates.

A Strange Mount of Olives

He is represented as showing to them our Lord, who is overcome by the agony He is enduring. Pilate is saying, "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas or Jesus, which is called Christ?" And the crowd are pointing upwards and crying, "Let Him be crucified. His blood be upon us and on our children." Barabbas is seen on the right-hand side in chains, with his hands bound, and just above him Pilate is washing his hands; one page holds the basin whilst another pours water from an ewer.

Then Christ is led away by the soldiery, who, after scourging Him and clothing Him in a scarlet robe, are mocking and ridiculing Him. One is spitting on Him; another smites Him on the head; whilst a third—a hump-backed dwarf—kneels in front of Him saluting Him derisively and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Last of all comes perhaps the most curious and tragic group of all this strange collection. It shows us the most horrible thing the sculptor could conceive in the way of evil spirits. The two solitary

The Romance of Religion

figures make the picture all the more striking, accustomed as we have been to so many actors in each scene. From a rough, gnarled trunk, that might be a dragon tree of distorted shape, we see Judas hanging. His attitude is one of despair, and the Evil One, who has been leading him on to take his life, waits beside him to gloat over his ruin.

It is difficult to extract much information from the good lady in charge of the chapel, for she contents herself with smiling copiously and assuring you in execrable Swiss-German, such as no sane person can understand, that these are very fine carvings, and that she knows of many a one who would give his eyes to get them.

The old abbey has now, alas! been turned into a college for school teachers, but the chapel, with its precious relic, still acts as a loadstar to many a pious pilgrim, while heretics will be drawn to Kreuzlingen to wonder at the patience and skill of the creator of the Oelberg.

It is one of those sights which escape the

A Strange Mount of Olives

slavish haunter of galleries and museums on his dismal tours. But to the lover of the Middle Ages, the fanciful soul and the religious dreamer, it will always afford unalloyed delight.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASKED MEN OF TUSCANY

FROM my hotel balcony at Leghorn I have often beheld a fantastic scene, which seemed made for the cover of a sensational romance, and took me back at once right into the Middle Ages. Adown the "Street of the Angel" opposite, there suddenly emerged some ten or twelve men dressed in black calico dominoes, with long, black masks, surmounted by black wideawakes. At first I fancied they must be celebrating carnival before its time, for they proceeded at a great pace, with light, vigorous strides. Then I noticed that they carried something very like a coffin on their shoulders, and

The Masked Men of Tuscany

I was convinced that this must be a modern version of the Dance of Death.

Afterwards I learned that they were members of the Misericordia Society, which succours the sick and buries the dead gratuitously. It is some four hundred years old, but is not a monastic order, the members being ordinary citizens, who give their services voluntarily, and wear masks that they may not seem to do their good works ostentatiously.

Perhaps their most startling appearance is at night-time, when they are engaged in conveying a corpse to their cemetery. You meet a number of masked figures, clad in black from head to foot, carrying a coffin through some secluded suburb, with torches and lanterns in their hands, and a large crucifix borne aloft before them. They proceed in silence, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, and, if every one in Tuscany were not entirely familiar with their appearance, might be relied upon to send a nervous woman into a fit.

The Romance of Religion

Hearing that the headquarters of the Society was in the main street, but a few steps away from my hotel, I determined to pay it a visit. The doors were wide open, for the brethren are constantly coming and going on their works of mercy, and I made my way down a long stone passage, where a picture of our Lady of Mercies was let into the wall, behind a glass pane.

In a central hall, where the air was laden with disinfectants, I found the official of the day, a very courteous young man, who displayed great alacrity in showing me over. It is a coveted charge among the brethren to be placed in superintendence, though no remuneration attaches to the post.

He took me first into the "magistrate's room," where the various elections and administrative business of the Society take place. There was a semicircular table at the inner end, bearing a large silver crucifix, some urns, and a bowl of beans for voting. On the opposite

The Masked Men of Tuscany

wall were the portraits of King Humbert and the President of the Society. At the sides were the coats-of-arms of the seventy branches of the Society, which has its headquarters at Florence and is limited to Tuscany.

Some of the arms were very curious. That of the Leghorn branch consists of the head of S. John the Baptist in a charger. Others represented a dog with a long candle in its mouth, the Dominican emblem;¹ two gold-headed staves crossed behind a skull; a crucifix with a luminous skull and cross-bones in the centre; and a naked arm crossed with a clothed arm, the hands of both being pierced through the palm.

On the walls I noticed a list of the executive committee, headed by Monsignore the Bishop, the Prefect of the town, the Sindaco of the district, and Monsignore the Vicar-general, thus showing that, in the case of this excellent in-

¹ The Dominicans punningly derive their name from *Domini canes*, the dogs of the Lord.

The Romance of Religion

stitution, if in no other, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities are at one.

Coming out into the hall, I inspected the appurtenances of night expeditions—long torches, warranted to blaze in any wind ; quaint old-fashioned lanterns, bound with iron and affixed to the ends of poles ; black hand-lanterns, and plated crucifixes with long handles. A more elaborate crucifix, for use on very special occasions, was respectfully draped in dark stuff.

The next room consisted only of infinite rows of polished cupboards, containing the costumes of the brethren, such as they have worn for four centuries. I was allowed to inspect one, and even to try it on. There was a long cloak of very thick glazed calico, like a black oilskin. This came down to my heels, but I was told that the brethren were bound to wear black, or at least very dark, trousers, even though the cloak completely covered them.

The mask was of thinner calico, not unlike oiled silk, with two slits for the eyes. It

The Masked Men of Tuscany

covered the head completely, like a bag, and was surmounted by a black hat, shaped like a cardinal's. Black gloves, a black girdle, a rosary of black beads, and a medal or badge of membership completed the costume, which has been worn ever since the foundation of the Society. The great object of the dress is completely to conceal the identity of a brother while on duty, and, if any part of the costume is absent, even the gloves or the girdle, the brother is relentlessly turned back.

Attached to the robing-room is a big desk, like a witness-box, where the brethren inscribe their names on returning from an expedition. This inscription is the chief incentive to regular attendance.

The Society has a big bell, which is heard all over Leghorn. One ring of the bell, followed by one sharp stroke, signifies that volunteers are required to carry a sick person ; two rings and two strokes announce an accident ; three rings and three strokes a mortal accident ; and so on.

The Romance of Religion

During the latter part of Holy Week the bell does not ring, and the brethren are summoned by other means.

Directly a brother hears the bell he is expected to hasten to the building, and the first-comers are first employed. Their only reward for the service is permission to inscribe their names, those with most inscriptions receiving bronze and silver medals, the right to nominate girls for the small dowries bestowed by the Society, and the right to distribute the Society's bread-tickets to the poor.

I was lucky enough during my visit to witness the departure and return of a party of brethren. Soon after my arrival, the bell rang for a convoy to take a woman to the hospital. The last echoes of the bell had scarcely died away when a number of men hurried in, well-to-do citizens for the most part. They rushed to their cupboards as if their lives depended on it, and, in an incredibly short time, were ranged round an empty litter in the courtyard in their mysterious garb.

The Masked Men of Tuscany

It was amazing to see how completely their costume transformed them. One moment I was surrounded by a bevy of ordinary modern citizens ; the next I was plunged into an atmosphere of mediævalism. The speed and order of the brethren reminded me of a fire brigade. Only long practice could have enabled them to assemble in so rapid and exemplary a manner.

The senior brother took command at once, deciding who should bear the litter, who should precede, and who should follow it. Absolute obedience to him is exacted, and any one questioning his orders is instantly sent home. He proclaims in a loud voice : "*Procedamus in pace*" (Let us proceed in peace), and the others reply, "*In nomine Domini. Amen*" (In the name of the Lord. Amen). Then the great iron gates are thrown open, and the party sets out at the double.

There are elaborate rules for the behaviour of the brethren on service, and any infraction is

The Romance of Religion

visited with dismissal. They must not raise their eyes to the windows of the street, nor notice any one they meet. If, however, they encounter the bishop, or a priest bearing the Host, they must put down their burden and kneel down to ask a blessing, and if they meet the King or his troops, they are to raise their hats. When they pass a church they must also raise their hats.

On returning to the building they gather round the brother in command while he offers up a prayer, and are then dismissed to sign their names and remove their costume.

Perhaps the most interesting part of my visit was the sight of the various coach-houses adjoining the courtyard. First I was shown a very gorgeous hearse, which is used for burying specially honoured members of the society. It was of black, polished wood, elaborately gilded, and surmounted by a magnificent baldaquin. It must be of immense weight, and requires four horses, except for quite short journeys.

The Masked Men of Tuscany

In an inner room I was shown a choice collection of palls employed with this hearse. In the centre of each pall the arms of the Society were embroidered, the head of S. John the Baptist being worked with particular detail. The richest of the palls was some twelve feet square, made of the finest black velvet richly worked with gold lace. It had been worked at Milan, and had cost a large sum. For children's funerals a red pall was used, but this was kept on a bier in the coach-house.

One of the curiosities of this coach-house was a shelf with a number of litters employed by the Society during the cholera epidemic of 1835—a date which had been painted on them to recall the occasion. They were rude and old-fashioned litters, with iron handles to lift them on to carts, and contrasted strangely with the more perfect appliances now in use.

I approached them with involuntary misgivings of possible infection, and wondered whether it had been wise to keep them, in spite of their

The Romance of Religion

interest as memorials. They fired my conductor to launch forth into reminiscences of the cholera epidemic of 1893, when the pluck, energy, and self-sacrifice of the brethren were taxed to the utmost. Pray God, he concluded piously, that they might never be called upon to go through so trying a time again.

The next coach-house was full of ambulance appliances, many of them most intricate and costly. There was a flat box on wheels, from which was produced an elaborate steel crane, with a swing arrangement for lifting patients out of their beds and depositing them easily in the litters of the Society.

The ordinary litter consisted of a bed, with sheets and blankets, recalling a bunk on board ship. The bed was arranged on a bier covered with a circular cage and green waterproof rug. A wire attached to one of the handles enabled the bearers to ring a bell, and warn people to clear the way when the convoy was passing. Underneath the litter was a wooden drawer, con-

The Masked Men of Tuscany

taining all the necessary bandages and medicaments for emergencies.

These litters are very familiar in the streets of Leghorn. A friend of mine met one, when a passer-by told him that there was an Englishman in it. He went up to see, and found that the patient was a jockey from the stables at Pisa, who had just broken his leg steeplechasing. The curious thing was that my friend had met him that very morning, and the jockey had said when they parted, "I only hope I sha'n't break my leg to-day."

For long convoy from the country there is a still more elaborate conveyance, drawn by a pair of horses. Its outward appearance reminded me of Black Maria, the London prison van. Inside, it appeared half omnibus half railway carriage, with racks for light luggage. The litter was placed on a kind of bench, with seats for the attendants, whose duty it was to steady it. The front of the van was cut off as an ante-room for the other brethren whose services were not

The Romance of Religion

immediately required, and the coachman sat outside.

Every brother goes through a course of ambulance lectures, including the treatment of the drowning, previous to admission as an active member, so that all know what to do in an emergency before taking a sufferer to hospital. As there are no fewer than 9,000 brethren in Leghorn alone (a town of 106,000 souls), it is evident that one stands a good chance of obtaining efficient help in case of an accident.

I was next taken to see the chapel, an imposing building, with a perfect forest of silver candlesticks arrayed on the altar. Service is frequently held there, but not every week. On the Sunday before my visit there had been a special requiem for the repose of the souls of all departed brethren, and the walls had been hung with black.

The Society owns a private cemetery, and many people join with the sole object of obtaining burial in that peaceful and picturesque spot,

The Masked Men of Tuscany

uncontaminated (as a fervent Papist remarked to me) by the presence of "Jews, Protestants, and other infidels." The Society is restricted to Roman Catholics, but if, during the convoy of a sick or dead man, it is discovered that he is no Papist, he is taken to his destination all the same, though there are minute rules for the immediate withdrawal of the chaplain, with all crucifixes and other emblems of religion.

Besides the convoy of the sick, wounded, and dead, the Society concerns itself with visiting invalids and prisoners. A brother will readily sit up all night with a sick man, but is not permitted to address a word to him. I can imagine few things more ghastly or terrifying than to wake up from a fever, and find by your bedside a black masked figure, which refused to utter a word in answer to your inquiries and entreaties. The visitation of prisoners in the Misericordia garb should also facilitate escapes, and I commend the idea to any novelist in search of a plot.

The Romance of Religion

Lastly, I saw the night quarters, where nine brethren take it in turn to sleep in case of a sudden call. The senior brother sleeps in a room by himself, the others on truckle beds in another room.

What particularly struck me about the Misericordia Society was the immense amount of work accomplished for so very small an expenditure. Here only a very small number of necessary servants receive any remuneration at all, and practically the whole funds are available for doing good.

I know of no other country where you could find over one-twelfth of a large town's population eagerly joining a society, their subscriptions to which bring them no personal advantage, and not even public recognition for their benevolence, but impose a liability to arduous and often disagreeable duties.

Such a society could not assuredly be founded in the present day. It is mediæval in its scope and spirit, and mediæval in the thoroughness and

The Masked Men of Tuscany

modesty with which it accomplishes its good works. Right well may the Tuscans take pride in their Confraternity of Pity.

CHAPTER V

A CITY OF NUNNERIES

IT was not until I went to Ghent the other day that I had ever heard of a *béguinage*, and I imagine most people are almost as ignorant as I was. Yet the institution was at one time extremely powerful. It flourished over a great part of Christendom; it aroused endless controversies throughout the Middle Ages; and even now its remnants, which are to be found in Belgium alone, possess many unique characteristics, and well deserve to be visited and described. No one even knows the real origin of the name, but the most plausible derivation is from S. Begga, the patron.

The *béguinages* differ from all other religious

A City of Nunneries

houses in that their members can always leave the Order if they so desire. Indeed, they upset all preconceived notions about nunneries. Instead of a jealously guarded building, where the intrusion even of the most ancient and ill-favoured male would arouse as much resentment as that of an hawk into a dovecot, we find a vast collection of religious edifices, forming quite a town of their own, and extending a kindly welcome to all who care to visit them. At Ghent I saw two *béguinages*, regular walled-in cities, entered by turretted gateways. They had their own streets, rows and rows of them stretching away in every direction ; and their own village green or town park, overlooked by a big church, which almost deserved the title of a cathedral. When I first drove through the larger establishment I seemed to have entered a great maze, and I vowed that I should never be able to find my way about on foot, for every street and every house appeared the exact counterpart of its fellow. Each was of the same venerable red brick, with the same

The Romance of Religion

tiled gables, and queer, high chimneys. In front of each was a small patch of fragrant garden, full of hollyhocks and other old-fashioned flowers, with branches of bright laburnum nodding over the high walls. Never, surely, was there a more smiling and peaceful scene.

On the green were acres of clothes spread out to dry, and long files of novices kept coming forward with fresh armfuls and basketfuls. Such, I was told, is the fame of the *béguinage* laundries that the Paris dandies, who used to send their linen to be washed in England, now make a point of dispatching it hither. But for this simple occupation, and the slight stir aroused by the arrival of the baker's dogcart (literally a dogcart, seeing that it is drawn by dogs), the place might almost be a city of the dead. All the streets are grass-grown, and the few nuns who flit swiftly but silently across from one house to another might be sisters of charity bound on some errand of mercy. Yet are they by no means immured. They may receive any visitors

A City of Nunneries

they please, and, besides walking about within their own city, they are frequently allowed to go out into Ghent to do their shopping. But then they must put a large black veil over the white linen coif, which they wear on all ordinary occasions and which is quite different from the usual nun's head-dress. On Sundays they add a big white veil to their attire. The novices always wear a little frilled cap, recalling that of an English baby or grandmother.

The streets, squares, and individual houses are all named after some saint or religious emblem, written up in ancient-looking Gothic characters, in the quaint Flemish tongue which looks so much like broken English. Here is the Huis (pronounced *Hois* and meaning House) van S. Franciscus van Assisi; and there the Convent van S. Eleonora; also the street of S. Pegga and the square of the "Goeden Herder" (Good Shepherd). Other establishments are dedicated to the Trinity and the Sacred Heart. The houses are numbered also, but the sisters know

The Romance of Religion

them far better by their religious names, which likewise have to suffice for the postman.

Each separate establishment has a strong door in the wall, generally surmounted by the figure of a saint in a niche. Underneath the number of the house is a scroll with its religious name, then a kind of iron cage, very small, jutting out perhaps two or three inches, and finally a letter-box. The cage covers a small peep-hole and a sliding panel, which is always slipped back before the door is opened, so that the inmates may see with whom they have to do. You have only to ring any bell at random, and in a minute or two you will hear a little click as the panel is drawn back. Then, if your appearance inspires confidence, you will find ready admittance.

Members of convents elect their own Superiors, who in their turn elect the Groot-Jufvrouw, or Lady Superior, of the whole *béguinage* or city of nunneries. The younger and poorer sisters all live in convents, some of which have as many as twenty or thirty inmates. But the majority of



Hard at work on the Trousseau of a Flemish Countess.

[To face p. 64]

A City of Nunneries

the houses in the city of nunneries are built to hold from four to six persons only. None are admitted to the *béguinage* unless they have means of their own to the extent of £12 a year. This will maintain them in a convent, but life in a small house is more expensive, and the profits of lace-making, washing, or other simple industries are carefully accumulated until this greater privacy and freedom can be afforded.

Let us take a peep inside one of the pleasantest of the convents. The rooms are all whitewashed and spotlessly clean (a characteristic of Flanders). Except for a few texts and religious pictures, there is scarcely any adornment ; but the sun streams in through the white muslin blinds, and brings with it the perfume of an hundred simple flowers. We are taken first to the work-room, which conveys the impression of a girls' school, though most of the pupils have done with school-days a long generation ago. The sisters are seated on chairs all round the walls, and each has a kind of desk before her,

The Romance of Religion

where she keeps her work and materials. Those who do not make lace usually occupy themselves with embroidery, drawn linen work, or fine stitching, while the old nuns, whose eyes will not stand a strain, are content with humble knitting. Over the chimney-piece are hung a carved skull and cross-bones, and on the opposite wall is a large lithograph, representing the pains of purgatory, to remind the sisters of the world to come.

We proceed next to the refectory, which is perhaps the most interesting part of the place. The sisters have their mid-day meal at a long wooden table in the middle of the room, but at supper-time they adhere to the old traditional usage of the *béguinage* and eat—as their predecessors have done for centuries—each at a cupboard in the wall. A little ledge pulls out to form a table, and the shelves are full of crockery and provisions, with two or three small religious pictures set out in front of them. The cupboards are ranged all round the walls and, when closed, might easily pass for panelling. Each nun has



The Supper Refectory.

[To face p. 66,

A City of Nunneries

a cupboard of her own, and takes a pride in keeping it clean and tidy. The bedrooms are plainer still, and contain only a narrow bed, a chair, a praying-stool, a washing-stand, and a few engravings of sacred subjects. These rooms command a cheerful view over the smiling gardens of the neighbouring buildings.

All the nuns are overflowing with good-nature, and take a pride in showing everything. They find especial delight in being photographed—more particularly the older ones—and they certainly make a very pretty picture among the flowers in their old-fashioned gardens. Before posing they have to run off and ask permission of their Superior, who treats the whole affair as a huge joke, and sees no harm in tourists taking as many snap-shots as they like. In the town, however, I learned that photographs are not allowed to be taken for sale.

The small *béguinage* in the centre of Ghent also deserves a visit. It forms a mediæval town on a smaller scale. The outer gates look as if

The Romance of Religion

they led at most to a stable-yard, but when the portress has pulled them back, and you have driven in, you feel as though you had suddenly waked up in a bit of Flanders several centuries ago. The dwellings are just like dolls'-houses and as neat as any box of toys. They are bright red and white, with window-sashes of the most vivid emerald green. Overflowing with verdure and grouped round an overgrown village green, they only need a few children in poke-bonnets to make up the exact counterpart of a Kate Greenaway picture.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE WOMEN NEVER SPEAK

FAR down in the south-western corner of France, on the borders of Spain and under the shadow of the Pyrenees, there dwells the strangest and most austere order of nuns in the world. These are the Bernardines of Anglet, sisters of S. Bernard, the almost incredible severity of whose rule most resembles that of the famous Trappist monks. Indeed, they appear even more meritorious when one remembers that weak women cannot bear the same hardships or sufferings as men. These devoted nuns abandon themselves to a life of solitude and take a vow of perpetual silence, which every one must

The Romance of Religion

allow is far more praiseworthy in a woman than in one of the sterner sex. When I was staying at Biarritz recently I heard so much about these nuns, and such interesting tales about their lives, that I determined to go over to Anglet and visit them in their hermitage among the beautiful pine forests.

I drove through sandy dunes and pine woods, and at last found myself before a wicket-gate, opening upon a long avenue of pine and poplar trees. Here the sense of monastic seclusion came over me at once, for on a signboard near the gate I read the words, "*Prière de parler à voix basse.*" As the Bernardines themselves may never speak or even look at any one, it was no use addressing myself to them, but I soon espied a kind, cheerful-looking *Sœur de Marie*, belonging to an adjoining convent, reading some holy book beside a little shrine. She put the work aside at once, and volunteered in a whisper to take me over the Bernardine quarter. She led me through a high wooden gateway,

Where Women Never Speak

and then I found myself in a garden shut in on every side by low white buildings.

Here were a number of white figures not unlike bales of coarse flannel. Over their heads, arranged so as almost to conceal their faces, were long black woollen hoods, which were rendered the more striking by the great white crosses affixed to their backs. Each nun wore rough wooden sabots and round her neck a chain, to which was attached a large cross. There was little of the appearance of the ordinary nun about their attire, which contrasted strikingly with the flowing dark blue robes and snow-white coifs of the *Sœurs de Marie*.

All the silent Bernardines seemed very busy—raking, hoeing, and weeding; and I noticed that none of them lifted their eyes from the ground, or seemed aware of our presence. My companion told me that, according to the rules, all curiosity of the eyes must be mortified. When Louis Napoleon Buonaparte visited the convent in 1854, he asked to be allowed to see the

The Romance of Religion

interior of a cell. The Abbey Cestac, founder of the monastery, threw open the door of one, disclosing a nun seated on a wooden stool at needlework, her back turned to the door. She did not move, but went on working quietly.

“May we not see her face?” asked Buonaparte.

“My child,” said the Abbé, “the Emperor and Empress are at the door of your cell and wish to see you.”

The nun turned at once towards them and threw back her hood, showing the most exquisite face of a girl of eighteen. A murmur of admiration and pity escaped from every one. The Bernardine, however, remained absolutely unconcerned, with her hands crossed on her breast and her eyes cast on the ground. She did not seem to be aware of their presence.

“Your Majesty sees,” said the courtly Abbé, “how implicitly the Bernardines obey their rules. Not even for the privilege of beholding an Emperor will they raise their eyes from the ground.”

Where Women Never Speak

Scattered about in the garden are various shrines containing images of the Virgin and the Saints, and on summer days the sisters come and sit near these with their needlework. The Bernardines, by the way, are famous for their exquisite sewing. They make a great many trousseaux, and I was shown a large stock of fairy-like embroideries for church linen, and handkerchiefs which must have taken many weeks or months to make.

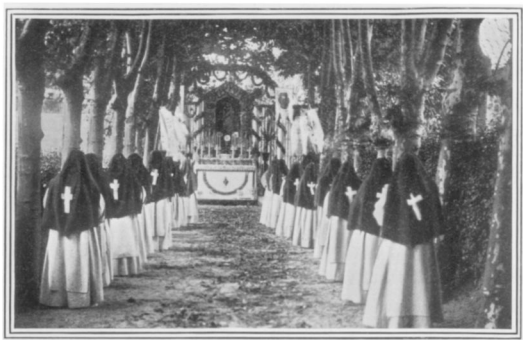
Under a thatched shelter stands a beautiful group of *Notre Dame de Pitié*, which was presented by a lady who had lost every one she loved. Here the Bernardines often come to pray for the souls of the departed, while others saunter along the neighbouring footpaths wrapped in pious meditation, utterly oblivious of the great world outside.

My blue-robed guide next took me into the chapel, which serves as a place of worship for the *Sœurs de Marie* as well as for the Bernardines themselves, who, faithful to their vow

The Romance of Religion

of solitude, have their portion divided off by a curtain, behind which they listen to the Mass. The only occasion on which the nuns open their lips to speak is when they join in the prayers. If it were not for this they would probably almost forget how to talk!

On the altar of the chapel stands an image of Our Lady of Sorrows, draped in crape, and wearing an expression of infinite sadness. In her hand she holds a crown of thorns, and on her breast is a heart pierced by seven swords. There is a strange story as to how the image first came to Anglet. Many years ago, during the first Carlist war, a number of Spanish refugees took up their abode near Bayonne, and the Convent of the Bernardines was one of their favourite places of pilgrimage. Amongst them was a lady of most distinguished appearance, who was remarked for her piety. One day, after she had been praying for many hours in the chapel, she came to the Abbé and said to him, "Father, I will send you a statue worthy of the



A procession of Silent Nuns.

[To face p. 74.]

Where Women Never Speak

Solitude." Some months afterwards the image arrived, but no one knew whence it came nor who was the donor. Long afterwards, when the Abbé was in Madrid, being overtaken by a storm one day, he sought refuge in a convent. On being asked his name, he replied that he was the Abbé Cestac of Anglet. The Prioress suddenly became very much interested and welcomed him warmly, saying, "Ah, it is you then who have Our Blessed Lady of Sorrows. Shall I tell why we sent her to you? At that time our Abbess, the Royal head of the convent, was for a long while exiled in France. Suddenly she came back to us one day, but although we were in transports of joy at the sight of her, she seemed strangely sad and preoccupied. At last she said, 'Daughters, it is true that I have been restored to you again, but, alas! we have a heavy price to pay for my return. During my stay in France I made many a pilgrimage to a convent near Bayonne. One day, as I was praying, a Divine voice whispered to me, "You shall no longer be

The Romance of Religion

persecuted—you shall return again to your own land, but in return for this you too must make a sacrifice. You must offer up the beloved statue of Our Lady of Sorrows.”” The sisters were overwhelmed with grief, for our Abbess could not have demanded a greater sacrifice. However, for her sake we yielded, and you, my father, now possess our most sacred treasure.”

It was the Abbé Cestac, a saintly priest of Bayonne, who founded the convent at Anglet in 1839. At first, owing to lack of funds, the nuns went through every sort of suffering, often having absolutely nothing to eat and no prospect of obtaining anything. However, by sheer pluck and hard work these courageous women overcame every difficulty, and now, although they are not rich, they can at least provide themselves with the necessities of life. Their needs, after all, are very small. They fast constantly and, when they do eat, their food consists of vegetables, dry bread, and, three times a week, a little—a very little—meat. The refectory is a long, narrow,

Where Women Never Speak

whitewashed room with a thatched roof and no artificial flooring, merely the deep sand of the dunes, which, however, provides the most comfortable of carpets. Each nun has her earthenware pitcher of water and a little drawer in the rough deal table where she keeps her wooden spoon, fork, and platter. On Fridays the Bernardines take their meals kneeling on the sand. At the appointed hour they make their way in single file to the refectory.

Every hour of the day is carefully mapped out, for the rules of the Order insist that not a moment shall be wasted. There are constant prayers on every occasion. Each time the big clock of the monastery chimes the hour, every nun falls on her knees and spends a few moments in prayer. Out in the fields it is marvellous to see how well the oxen know those chimes. Directly they hear them they stop instinctively, starting on their way again the instant the sisters rise from their knees.

These wonderful women have actually built

The Romance of Religion

their own houses, workmen being only called in to put on the roof! At first they were most curious little huts, made (walls and all) entirely of thatch. They were but 7 feet high by 7 feet broad, and had no window. Underfoot was sand, and the furniture consisted merely of a wooden chair and a bed made of branches, on which was piled a layer of straw or dry leaves. A rough, woollen coverlet and a little hard pillow completed the bedclothes. These huts were used for many years, but at last they were obliged to be discarded, as the number of deaths caused by the cold and wet was appalling. My cicerone, the courteous *Sœur de Marie*, took me to see one of these little huts, which is still kept as a relic of the past. She told me that even now the Bernardines are but short-lived. Hardly one of them reaches middle age, and even in the prime of life they look like aged women. The thatched chapel gives an idea of what these huts were like. However, though the original plan may have been modified, the result is just the



The Straw Chapel.

[To face p. 78.]

Where Women Never Speak

same, and the sister impressed upon me that the beds were not a whit less hard and uncomfortable than they used to be.

Next we see a number of nuns, each sitting by the door of her little cell in the long, white corridor outside. It is their hour of recreation, and a *Sœur de Marie* is reading aloud to them from a work of devotion. Even during recreation they are not allowed to rest, but are always busy with their needles. The corridor is their only sitting-room, and a very cold one it must be in the winter, for there are no fires whatsoever at Anglet. Round the walls are a few pictures and sacred images, and everywhere one reads admonitory sentences, such as, "If you remember your sins, God will forget them; if you forget them, He will remember them."

The thatched chapel is a very quaint little structure. The floor is, as usual, of sand, and tiny windows, set in the thatch walls, give a very dim, religious light. On the altar is a statue of the Virgin, and below it another of Our

The Romance of Religion

Lord, stretched on a couch. An inscription at the door relates how Queen Victoria visited the chapel and prayed there when she was staying at Biarritz in 1889. Prayers have been granted in the most miraculous way, said the sister. The Empress Eugénie came here to beg for a son, and remained a long time, praying with much fervour. As she was leaving, the Abbé Cestac said to her, "Madam, the most Holy Virgin has vouchsafed to me the knowledge that your request will be granted. Do not fear, for assuredly your prayer has been heard."

And, strange to say, some months later a little Prince Imperial came into the world.

The cemetery is as austere-looking as the rest of the nunnery. The graves are the simplest little sandy mounds huddled close together in the most pathetic way, with a rude cross traced in cockle-shells upon them. At the head of each is a little bush, while firs and gloomy cypress trees are dotted around. Here the nuns spend much of their time praying for the souls of the



In the Cemetery.

[To face p. 80.]

Where Women Never Speak

dead, sometimes at the grave of the Abbé Cestac's father, a holy man, who is buried here; and sometimes in the tiny thatched chapel which they have erected.

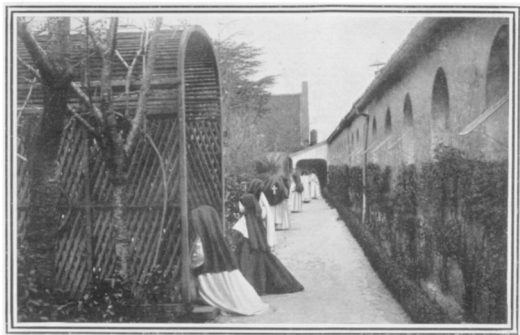
The Bernardines have no fear of death. On the contrary, they long for it. When the first Superior of their Order lay a-dying she had an interview with one of her nuns, who implored her to intercede on her behalf in heaven that she too might die soon. The Superior smiled, and in an inspired voice said that in a month her request should be granted. On the day of burial, just as the coffin was to be closed, the nun drew near to the body, whispered in its ear, and slipped a note into the dead hand, imploring the Superior not to forget her promise. Just a month from that date the nun, too, passed away, and so the promise was fulfilled.

Although it seems hard to believe, the Bernardines do sometimes have their feast days. We may see them in single file as usual, celebrating All Saints' Day, which in the Pyrenean

The Romance of Religion

provinces is counted as one of the greatest of religious festivals. An altar is erected and beautifully decorated at the end of the long avenue of poplar trees, and here the nuns assemble with banners and crosses. Even then, however, everything is so subdued and noiseless that it seems hard to believe that they can be rejoicing.

Perhaps the following story will illustrate better than any mere description how minutely the penitential rules of this extraordinary Order are obeyed. Two Bernardines lived side by side for five years in two adjoining cells, and so thin a partition divided them that they could even hear the sound of each other's breathing. All this time they ate at the same table and prayed in the same chapel. At last one of them died, and, according to the rule of the Order, the dead nun was laid in the chapel, her face uncovered, and the Bernardines filed past, throwing holy water upon the remains as they went. When it came to the turn of the next-door neighbour, no sooner did she catch a sight of



In the Cloisters.

[To face p. 82.]

Where Women Never Speak

the dead nun's face than she gave a piercing shriek and fell back in a swoon. She had just recognised her dearest friend in the world, from whom she had parted with the deepest pain many years before to enter the convent. For five years the two friends had lived side by side without ever having seen each other's face or heard the sound of one another's voice.

CHAPTER VII

THE VOTARIES OF ETERNAL SILENCE

OF all those who have sought to expiate either their own sins or those of humanity at large by a course of penitence and self-abasement, none have come up to the Trappists in the severity of their rule or the rigour of their voluntary privations. They have, indeed, almost passed into a proverb for abnegation of the world, not merely as regards its various pomps and vanities, but with reference to everything which goes to make life happy and even endurable. It is, therefore, with the utmost bewilderment that a visitor to their famous monastery finds the brethren of this austere

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

community as contented and even as cheerful a set of people as are to be numbered amongst the most zealous pleasure-seekers.

It is true that they get up at two in the morning ; that they limit their meals to a small allowance of fruit and vegetables washed down with spring water ; that their days are devoted to hard manual labour, relieved only by frequent intervals of prayer ; that they sleep on bedsteads of planks and straw ; that they may never speak except in cases of absolute necessity ; that their thoughts are constantly centred upon their latter end ; and that there is no relief for their hardships even at the point of death, when, as a last and most signal object-lesson of austerity, they are removed from their straw and laid out upon a heap of ashes.

But it must be remembered that all this is undergone voluntarily, and that, just as a generous person finds a pleasure in giving away things which he needs himself, so the brethren of La Trappe discover happiness and

The Romance of Religion

consolation in mortifications which would be unendurable if imposed against their will. Prisoners who have been condemned to absolute silence and seclusion have generally gone mad in a short period of time, but the Trappists find that their vow of silence confers a fresh zest upon their chaunts in church and upon all their devotional exercises, and it is certainly a fact that they enjoy extraordinary health and spirits and usually attain to a good old age. A hard bed may be disagreeable at first if you have been used to feathers and down, but all are agreed that it is exceedingly healthy. The same thing applies to their coarse woollen garments, and perhaps also to their vegetarian diet. Indeed, the eloquent fact remains that whenever there has been an epidemic in their neighbourhood it has always spared them, though they have not shrunk from lavishing their ministrations upon the sick.

One reason why they have stood their hardships so well is that no one is ever admitted to

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

their novitiate who has not an evident vocation ; men who come under the influence of a great misfortune or disappointment, and ask to be admitted among the Trappists, are always discouraged, as indeed every other applicant is until sufficient time has elapsed to prove that he is really in earnest. Once finally admitted, the difficulty is not to incite the friars to austerities, but to keep their zeal within proper bounds. For instance, when one of them is ill, the rules insist that he shall eat meat and enjoy whatever comforts are necessary to his recovery.

But it is very difficult to induce a monk to admit that anything is the matter with him, and even then he is most reluctant to submit to any indulgence. He seems to believe that it is essential to the salvation of his soul that he should mortify his body as much as possible, and every indulgence, however necessary, comes to be regarded by him as a lost opportunity. In any case, however, the indulgence is never a very great one according to our notions, as the re-

The Romance of Religion

markable by-laws on the subject amply testify. Nothing is refused to a sick man, we are told, except "luxurious victuals, which flatter the senses without repairing the strength." Veal and chicken, it may be noted, are reckoned among the forbidden luxuries. Other meats, however, and even baths are permitted, if prescribed by the doctor.

The various hardships I have enumerated are intended for the mortification of the body; the obligation of silence is looked upon as a mortification of the mind. But it must be remembered that it is not allowed to be so complete as to become a torture. Besides using his tongue to sing the office and to confess, a Trappist may consult his superiors, address the chapter or council when asked for his advice, read aloud on certain occasions, and speak whenever the exigencies of his work require it. He may even talk to the beasts of burden he is driving. There is, however, a rule which at first sight sounds rather Irish, that before a Trappist opens his mouth he must ask leave of his superior. He probably

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

does so by means of a gesture, and leave is never refused, though if it were taken advantage of for unnecessary speech it would entail a severe penance. The friars, indeed, soon become very expert in the language of gesture.

A story is told of a man who made a bet that he would compel one of the Trappist monks to break his vow of silence. He rode along a path until he saw a monk at work in the fields. Him he hailed and asked the way. So much being permitted as a work of charity, the monk answered, but when the rider went on to interrogate him on some trivial matter, he took refuge in silence. The man, however, persisted in his inquiries, and finally, losing his temper, struck the monk across the face with his whip. The monk, obeying the Gospel injunction, at once turned the other cheek to the smiter, who felt exceedingly ashamed of himself and, after profuse apologies, went his way, resigned to the loss of his bet.

The Grande Trappe, which is the chief house

The Romance of Religion

of the Order, is situated in a romantic Norman valley in the neighbourhood of L'Aigle and Mortagne, and its desolate appearance is in admirable keeping with the traditions of this Temple of Silence. The soil is so poor there that, until the monks set to work upon its cultivation, it was looked upon as a sterile waste. Indeed, when they first began their operations there, they were exposed to endless ridicule for wasting their energies upon a hopeless task. Now, however, there are plenty of trees and gardens about the monastery, which looks like a fine country house, or perhaps, rather, a smiling white village, as you approach it. After a parley with the lay brother at the entrance gate, you are led into the building, and two monks come forward to receive you. They wear long white robes, their heads are closely shaven, and their expression is one of mild benevolence.

All of a sudden, to your amazement, they prostrate themselves at full length on their faces at your feet like Moslems in an attitude of prayer.



Welcoming Guests.

[To face p. 96.

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

This is the traditional Trappist welcome, and is to be taken as an act of humility. Presently they rise and, without uttering a word, beckon you to follow them into the vast, peaceful church for a few minutes of silent prayer, after which they lead you into a waiting-room and read aloud a chapter of the "Imitation of Christ," until the arrival of the Father who is entrusted with the entertainment of guests.

He is kindness and consideration itself, placing all the resources of the monastery at your disposal, ordering an extra dish for your evening meal, and sparing no pains to minister to your welfare. The worthy cook may be seen bringing in a hare for your supper—a special favour, as the monks themselves eat no meat. After supper you are led to your bedroom, where there are no comforts, but every necessary—a good, clean bed, some chairs, a table with writing materials and pious books, a praying-stool and crucifix, and the various requisites of the toilet. Next day you may find that you have been fortunate enough

The Romance of Religion

to come in for two interesting ceremonies. First, there is that of washing feet. The monks are all ranged on benches along the walls, with wooden crosses on their breasts, and one of them is presently told to go round with a basin and towel and wash the feet of the others, as the Pope does those of twelve poor men in Holy Week. A sweet, solemn chaunt is in progress throughout the ceremonies, and the monk solemnly kisses each foot as he completes its ablution. A very small stretch of the imagination is needed to take you back into the Middle Ages.

The other ceremony is that of admitting four novices to full membership of the Order. Everything has been done to make them realise the full severity of the life which lies before them, and every possible discouragement has been presented to them, so that, if necessary, they may turn back while yet there is time. As a rule the novitiate lasts a year; but if there is any doubt about the absolute certainty of a man's suitability to become a Trappist, the period is



Admission of four novices to full Membership of the Order.

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

prolonged according to the discretion of the Abbot. The ceremony is one of peculiar solemnity, as is fitting in the case of what amounts almost to a living burial. The four novices remain flat on their faces in front of the high altar during the greater part of the ceremony, which consists of a number of penitential psalms ; of a solemn allocution, adjuring them for the last time to pause and consider well before taking this important step ; of a solemn dedication of their services to the Almighty ; and finally, of their reception with the kiss of peace by the rest of the brethren. The novices remain a good deal apart during their period of probation, but they assemble every day in a large, bare room to receive instruction from the Prior. They are for the greater part very young men, and wear expressions of great devoutness and religious enthusiasm ; but some of them are more advanced in life, and bear traces on their countenances of having gone through great tribulations.

Perhaps one of the most characteristic cere-

The Romance of Religion

monies is that of the *culpa*, when all the brethren assemble in the chapter-room for the denunciation of each other's shortcomings or breaches of the rules. Denunciations are looked upon as friendly acts. When there is any backwardness about them, the monks often denounce themselves, enumerating misdeeds of the mind, which only a very severe self-examination could ever have brought to light. When all the denunciations have been finished, the Abbot proceeds to mete out punishments. Sometimes a culprit is bidden remain prostrate with his mouth against the flags for a number of hours, or he may be told off to kiss the feet of all his fellows. In nearly every case the punishment is one which would be considered a gross indignity if it were not voluntarily accepted in all cheerfulness.

On Sunday you may assist at the Holy Communion, and notice how all the brethren bestow upon each other the kiss of peace before receiving the Sacrament. Another day you are privileged to enjoy a chat with the Abbot, whom

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

you find directing some irrigation works in the domain of the monastery. He will perhaps be standing among the other workers with a spade in his hand, and is only distinguishable from them by the large cross on his breast; he has sabots on his feet, and his coarse robe is drawn up to his knees. He is quite willing to give all manner of information about the history and present occupations of the Trappists. He points out that La Trappe is a great social as well as religious institution. The work of the monks more than suffices for their maintenance, nor do they depend upon charity or have to draw upon the reserves of the endowments. You can see for yourself the multifarious occupations of the monks, who can certainly not be accused of leading useless or indolent lives. In the morning the outdoor workers assemble with their various implements at a large cross in the grounds, and offer up prayers for a blessing on their labours. Out of doors you find them digging and draining the land, shoeing horses, haymaking, gardening, tending cattle, and digging graves.

The Romance of Religion

In one room they are engaged in the various processes of carpentry. In the dairy they are making huge cheeses, destined to form one of the principal items on their bill of fare. Farther on there is a regular factory, where chocolates are manufactured for sale to the public.

Elsewhere they are busy with the rough tailoring necessary for their costumes, and a sturdy friar presents a quaint appearance sitting at a sewing-machine. Attached to the library is a room where a group of friars is engaged in binding books with professional skill. Farther on there is a laundry, where every one is obliged to wash his own clothes once a week.

Among the important institutions of the monastery we must not omit to mention the medical hall and hospital, which are looked upon as a great boon by the whole countryside. Indeed, not only the peasants around, but the citizens of distant towns often come here for advice instead of consulting the local doctors, and the medical

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

advice given at the monastery has attained to a great reputation both far and near.

At the time of the French Revolution the Trappists were singled out for especially virulent persecution, and they very pluckily started off for Switzerland without in any way concealing their intention to emigrate or abandoning their ecclesiastical garb, which was to the mob like a red rag to a bull. On the tedious pilgrimage they observed all their ordinances with unimpaired stringency, keeping their vow of silence, except in cases of absolute necessity, and reading the various offices of the Church in their carts as they went along. As they could no longer till the ground or pursue their ordinary manual labours, they occupied themselves with making lint by the way. They kept to their usual food, and always slept on straw, though they paid at the inns like ordinary travellers in order not to disappoint their hosts. When any one struck them or insulted them by the way, they revenged themselves by praying for him.

The Romance of Religion

This incident of their flight must have been among the most dramatic of those exciting times, and it would seem as if a special Providence had watched over them to bring them safely through all their dangers to their destination. Later on Buonaparte took a fancy to them on hearing that they maintained themselves, and he encouraged them to return, but afterwards he repented and persecuted them.

The Trappists have a more or less democratic constitution. They elect their Abbot, but are forbidden to concert among themselves as to their choice. Obedience is only due to him so long as he conforms to the rules. From time to time a superior religious official comes round and interrogates all the monks secretly, comparing opinions and eliciting complaints or criticisms. In an extreme case an Abbot could be deposed by a chapter consisting of the heads of the various Trappist monasteries, but such an event is unknown, and, so far as it is possible to judge, the monks are all perfectly contented. For the Abbot,



The Wake of a dead Friar.

[To face p. 98.

The Votaries of Eternal Silence

monastic life is by no means a quiet retreat from the cares of the world, and he has a very busy time of it, superintending everything and ministering to the wants of his subordinates. His door must always be open to them at all hours, in case any of them should want to consult him about spiritual or bodily troubles, and they can always rely upon finding in him a ready and sympathetic listener.

If one of the friars happens to die during your visit, his wake is an extremely impressive sight. Stretched out on a rude wooden bier, with his brown cloak as his only winding-sheet, he occupies the main position in the centre of the church. Some half-dozen candles are placed around him in tall wooden candlesticks, and the friars take it in turns to pray beside him, never leaving him night or day until the time comes to lay him in the grave, which it has been one of his duties to dig for himself. You reflect over the simple, unpretentious, dreary end of a man who has spent the best years of his life in the extremes of self-

The Romance of Religion

sacrifice, going out of his way to deny himself the most innocent pleasures and the most natural comforts ; the peaceful, happy expression of his face haunts you long after you have passed away from the church and monastery, conjuring up doubts in your mind as to the sterling value of those earthly pleasures which you spend so many anxious thoughts and efforts in struggling to obtain.

CHAPTER VIII

MIRACULOUS IMAGES

IN the early days of Christianity, the Fathers of the Church sternly refused to allow images or even pictures in places of worship. This severity began to be relaxed in the third and fourth centuries, for those who were anxious to spread the Faith imagined that such things as appealed to the senses should be encouraged. But about the eighth century a determined stand was made against the veneration of images by a Byzantine Emperor. For many years there were great divisions between the Churches of the East and the West, until at last the West triumphed,

The Romance of Religion

and the cult of images became universal. At the Council of Trent the Church of Rome decreed that in future statues of Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints might be set up in places of worship, and due honour paid to the sacred personages they represented.

Soon some of the images acquired a special reputation. Suppliants imploring favours found their prayers heard, and if the prayer were offered up before the statue of Our Lady or some saint, that statue would speedily be counted miracle-working, and the sick, halt, maimed, and blind crowded to the shrine.

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary sights in Rome, or, indeed, anywhere else, is the shrine of the famous Madonna of Sant' Agostino. As you enter the church your eye is attracted by a glow of light on the western wall, cast by the innumerable silver lamps and candles which burn always before her. The entire wall of the church is covered with ex-voto offerings of every kind, and even round the



Miraculous Chapel of the Votive Offerings.

[To face p. 192.]

Miraculous Images

circular windows silver hearts of all sizes, enclosed in triangular glass frames, fill up the corners. All over the church, too, these silver hearts may be counted in their thousands, and seem to fill up every available space.

Some of the gifts are very curious. There are silver eyes from those who have recovered their sight, legs from the lame, ears from the deaf, while many thankful mothers make touching little offerings of their babies' tiny garments, which, like all the other offerings, are neatly framed. There are, of course, the usual quaint pictures depicting marvellous escapes from fire, water, horse or railway accidents, and great bouquets of artificial flowers.

As for the statue itself, unlike most miraculous images, which seem to combine sanctity with extreme ugliness, it is really a very fine piece of sculpture. Unluckily, there is little opportunity of seeing all its beauties, for it is laden with every kind of ornament, and gold chains, necklaces, and rosaries cover it like seaweed on a

The Romance of Religion

rock. Both the Virgin and Child have immense gold crowns studded with gems. The Madonna wears a diamond star in the middle of her forehead, great hanging earrings, and what Disraeli would have called ropes of pearls round her neck. Her fingers, moreover, are crowded to the very tip with the costliest rings, and numbers of others are attached to her arms and body.

As to the figure of the Infant Saviour, it is rendered absolutely shapeless by the mass of jewellery heaped upon it. The image of the Madonna has a silver foot, and Pope Pius VII. proclaimed an indulgence of two hundred days to all who should kiss the foot and repeat an ave. Sant' Agostino has been called the Methodist Chapel of the Roman Church, on account of the wild, unrestrained enthusiasm of the devotees of the image. There are always crowds before the shrine, chiefly women, who frequently prostrate themselves and touch the ground with their foreheads.

Next comes a very ancient image, which is



The Virgin of the Valley.

[To face p. 104]

Miraculous Images

kept on the high altar of the Church of San Esteban at Salamanca. It is called the Virgin de la Vega, and is in the old Byzantine style. The head and hands are of bronze, and the great staring eyes confer a weird, uncanny look. It wears a curious old crown, and the whole of the body is studded with precious stones. For many centuries this image has been revered by Salamanca; it is considered inexpressibly holy, and in 1618 was acclaimed patron of the city.

Still more famous and even extraordinary in appearance is the great Black Virgin of the Atocha in Madrid. Such is the splendour of her robes and the glitter of her golden, sun-like halo that the tiny face of the Virgin can scarcely be seen. The Virgin has her own court, chamberlains, and attendants. The Queen of Spain is first Lady-in-Waiting. The wardrobe is very extensive. Sometimes she dresses as a widow, but on days of great festivals her costumes are marvellously encrusted with gold and jewels. According to a custom since time immemorial, the

The Romance of Religion

Queens of Spain present their wedding dresses to the Atocha. The ex-Queen Isabella offered the dress she wore in 1858, when she was stabbed. The Atocha is brought as a doctor to Royal bed-sides as a last resource when all other aid is useless.

The Queen and Court attend a service once a week in her chapel, which is the pilgrimage Church of the Court. The Atocha is the patron of Madrid, and in old times, before the King of Spain set out on a journey or undertook any new enterprise, he would pay a visit to her chapel and pray for success. He used to drive thither in great pomp and ceremony, his coach drawn by eight horses, whilst regiments of guards lined each side of the way from the palace to the chapel. Many of the Spanish images have property of their own, such as the Virgin of Elche, who possesses not only the finest palm groves in the place, but also houses, which are marked with her initial and crown.

In mediæval days the holiest of all shrines to

Miraculous Images

which the faithful thronged was Loreto. For five hundred years Our Lady of Loreto has been the loadstar toward which the eyes of every pilgrim have been turned. Her statue, carved by S. Luke in wood of Lebanon, stands in a niche within the Holy House, and before it great silver lamps burn continually. This Santa Casa is said to be the Virgin's own house, wafted across the sea from Palestine and guided by angels' hands to Loreto. It consists of but one room, the exterior of which is encased in magnificent marbles. The chapel is a wonderful place. The offerings of the faithful for five centuries, in gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones are stored away within its walls, and the wealth represented is almost incalculable. It is, moreover, decorated with marvellous paintings by Paul Veronese, Guido, and Raphael.

In contrast with all these magnificent shrines, comes the fisherman's Virgin, the miraculous image of Arcachon. To her all the fishermen and oyster girls of the coast offer up their

The Romance of Religion

prayers for well-filled nets and deliverance from tempests. Her chapel does not gleam with jewels and silver lamps like that of the Atocha or the Bambino. It is a dark, low-roofed little offshoot of a village church, but the fisher folk of Arcachon would not exchange it for any in the world. In some eyes the Madonna may be merely an insipid ordinary-looking doll, clad in white muslin, with silver hearts, both great and small, stitched down the front of her dress, but to them she means a very real deliverance from all the dangers of the deep.

Round the chapel are all sorts of quaint offerings. There are life-buoys, with inscriptions telling how the giver was saved in answer to his prayers, and how he brought the buoy from the other side of the world to present to Our Lady of Arcachon. There are models of boats, fragments of ships, and here and there an oar with a message telling how, when in peril of death, a sailor called on Mary, Star of the Sea, and clutched the oar which kept him afloat till help came.

Miraculous Images

Certain crucifixes are also objects of deep religious veneration. The Cid's roughly hewn crucifix is known as the Christ of the Battles. Whenever the great Spanish captain went to war he carried it at his saddle-bow, and to its aid and miraculous powers he attributed his almost invariable success against the Moors. It is made of gilt brass, and is of Byzantine workmanship. On the head of Our Lord is a curiously shaped diadem instead of the crown of thorns. This crucifix was given by Ruy Diaz to the Bishop Geronimo, his firm friend and ally, and is preserved in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Salamanca, where the smaller one, which the Cid used to wear beneath his armour, may also be seen.

The most harrowing and terrible crucifix in the world is the extraordinary Santo Cristo of Burgos, the "Christ of the Eggs," as it is sometimes called, owing to the three great eggs at the foot of the cross. This image is famed all over Spain for the miracles it has wrought, and

The Romance of Religion

the priests who have charge of the chapel constantly declare that they have seen it move its head and arms.

The legend says that a merchant returning from Flanders found it when sailing alone in the Bay of Biscay. It was first preserved in the Augustine Monastery, and was so much coveted by other monks that twice it was stolen. Each time, however, the image refused to stay in its new home, and found its way back unaided to the Augustines. Now the Cristo hangs in a chapel in the Cathedral of Burgos. In former days it was concealed behind three curtains of silk covered with gold and pearl embroideries, which would open slowly and solemnly to the sound of bells on great ceremonies.

The weariness and death-like appearance of the figure are unutterable. To give an additional touch of realism, the wooden body is covered with human skin, which in the course of centuries has become all cracked and scarred. For a long time this was disbelieved, but a French writer

Miraculous Images

obtained permission to examine the figure closely, and confirmed the truth of it. He noticed, too, that on the hands and feet the nails are attached to the skin. The head is made of wood, but the hair and beard are real. The people of Burgos say that the hair has not ceased to grow, and moreover declare that the image sweats every Friday.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLY WEEK PROCESSION IN SEVILLE

SEVILLE is the home of dramatic religion, on a scale no less striking and elaborate than the worship of the old classical deities, which depended above all on amusing and interesting the masses. The piety and fervour of Seville must be altogether amazing to the Protestant mind. As an instance of the religious zeal which obtains at Seville, I may mention that the newspapers there devote nearly half a column every day to the various ecclesiastical functions. Religion in Seville is not a mere outward form, but a vital part of the daily life of the people.

All the innumerable feasts of the Church are

Holy Week Procession in Seville

zealously observed in Spain, but the Holy Week processions at Seville are certainly the most elaborate expression of Christian ritual to be found anywhere in the world. Therefore, it is easy to understand that they should attract countless visitors from every part of the world year after year, that prices should be doubled or even trebled, and that the whole population should abandon itself to what may almost be described as a carnival of religious enthusiasm.

The processions were originally started in the Middle Ages by a number of religious confraternities. Like political and other societies, the confraternities stimulate the zeal of their members by allowing them to dress up in a striking manner, and by conferring upon them all kinds of fine-sounding titles. They appeal also to the sense of mystery as well as to that of display. In old times the show was often grotesque. Christ would be represented as a mediæval courtier with a wig, sword, and knee-breeches, or the Virgin would appear as a stage marionette of the rudest design.

The Romance of Religion

Now, however, everything is artistic and decorous, so that none may deny his tribute of admiration.

There are at present no fewer than forty-four confraternities in Seville, besides twelve in the suburb of Triana. Each bears a name which sounds strangely in our ears, such as the Confraternity of Our Father Jesus of Great Power; the Confraternity of the Most Holy Mary of the O.; the Confraternity of the Conversion of the Good Thief; the Confraternity of the Fifth Agony of Mary Most Holy, &c. Each confraternity has a chapel, where it keeps the various paraphernalia required for the procession.

Among these, most particular attention is devoted to the groups of images known as *pasos*, some of them real works of art—some of them quite the reverse. Practically, they are gorgeous and realistic tableaux, the life-sized figures wondrously carved in wood and clothed in costly robes. They are moved along the streets on huge biers borne by men concealed beneath them with draperies, so that they appear to be advancing mysteriously

Holy Week Procession in Seville

by themselves. It is only on the occasion of the Holy Week procession, at times of plague and pestilence, or the rare festivals of the various confraternities that the *pasos* emerge at all. During the rest of the year they are carefully warehoused, with all their gorgeous appliances.

Let us witness a part of the procession passing through the Plaza de San Francisco, one of the principal squares of Seville, in which seats are most eagerly coveted. A good-humoured, gossiping crowd of sightseers (very characteristic of Seville) fills the whole square, save only a lane, which is, with difficulty, preserved for the procession as it makes its way into the Sierpes, a very narrow street, which has been chosen as the fashionable lounge of the town, chiefly because carriages are not allowed to proceed along it. In the centre, escorted and followed by priests in full canonicals, may be discerned the *paso* of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception with a conspicuous image of the Blessed Virgin, clad in an exceedingly rich cloak of purple velvet, em-

The Romance of Religion

broidered with gold. The word *paso* really signifies a group or figure in commemoration of the Passion ; but it has come to be applied to any group or figure which is carried in procession.

The most elaborate and complicated *paso* of all represents the meeting of Christ with S. Veronica, who held out a handkerchief to Him, upon which the imprint of His face remained. In the centre of the group He is carrying His cross, aided by Simon of Cyrene, whose bearded face may be made out in the background. A Jew, holding a rope and blowing a trumpet, occupies a far too conspicuous position in front. On one side S. Veronica is kneeling with the handkerchief ; on the other are three "daughters of Jerusalem," whom Christ forbade to weep for Him. One of the two thieves is conspicuous with bared chest. At the back are three Roman soldiers, the *senatus* or banner and eagle of the third being just discernible. The individual figures are admirably natural, but they are far too numerous for the exigencies of space on the platform.

Holy Week Procession in Seville

Next comes one of the most venerated of all the images, that of the Most Holy Mary of Protection, which belongs to a confraternity in Triana, the gipsy suburb and special haunt of all the cut-throats of Seville. Spaniards display great reverence towards all images of Our Lady, but reserve their special devotion for those which are credited with a miraculous origin. These remind one of the Pagan idols which are supposed to have fallen from Jupiter, and are either believed to have come down from heaven or else to have been secreted by the Goths at the time of the Moorish invasion. This image of the Virgin of Protection was found some three hundred years ago in a recess of a well, where the chapel of the confraternity was erected to commemorate the event. Every sort of miracle is said to have been performed by it, particularly at periods of pestilence, when it is always taken out in procession.

It is borne upon a platform of carved silver, adorned with a gorgeous daïs and a number of silver figures of saints and prophets, and is illu-

The Romance of Religion

minated by an imposing array of tall candles. It has one of the richest cloaks of any sacred image extant, made of the thickest velvet, profusely embroidered with gold, and valued at over £2,000. As the image passes, every head is uncovered, and the more pious people in the crowd fall on their knees to chaunt special hymns in its honour.

The next *paso* is that of the Confraternity of Jesus of Nazareth. The figure is one of the most celebrated, from the artistic point of view. The attitude of the Saviour has aroused much controversy, but the general opinion is that He is in the act of blessing the cross as He takes it up. A silver cherub at the back seems to be alleviating the burthen, and there are two others in front, one with a ladder to signify the approaching descent from the cross. The figure is standing upon a mound to represent Calvary, amid six handsome gilt candelabra. Along the sides of the pedestal are reliefs of various scenes of the Passion.

The Confraternity of the Most Holy Christ of

Holy Week Procession in Seville

the Waters at Triana, on the other hand, is one of the most modern ones, dating only from 1750, but the figure on its chief *paso* is of very ancient origin. In front of the crucifix we see an angel holding a chalice to receive the water and blood shed from the wounded Saviour's side ; and in the foreground is an image of the Virgin, wearing a crown and velvet cloak. Her image is often detached and carried upon a separate stand.

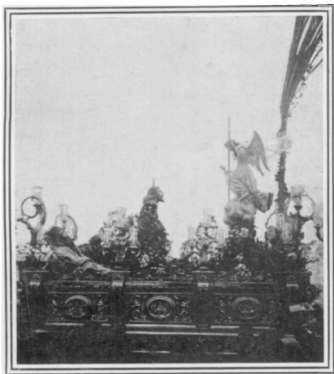
There are surely few sights to compare with that of the passage of the procession through one of the narrower streets of the town, with the people huddled against the white walls to make room for a *paso* escorted by gendarmes and preceded by white Nazarenes, with their curious old masked costume and pointed caps stiffened with cardboard. The *paso* itself is one of the more modern ones and needs no particular description, but the Confraternity of the Seven Words, to which it belongs, is one of the most ancient in Seville. It was formed in honour of an image of Our Lady of the Head and the Re-

The Romance of Religion

medies, which was revealed to a shepherd in the Sierra Morena by the tinkling of a bell in the year 1227. Among the prodigies performed by the image was the restoration of the shepherd's hand, which he had lost some years before.

The Confraternity of the Prayer in the Garden is one of the richest in groups of images and in its collection of chased silver insignia. It was founded in 1560 by the boatmen of the Guadalquivir, and soon obtained high patronage, which brought in much wealth.

The *paso* of the Prayer in the Garden is one of the most admired. In the centre is the Saviour on His knees, exhausted by His bloody sweat and the anticipation of His Passion. The attitude and expression of the face are admirably worked, and constitute one of the triumphs of wood figure-carving in which the Spaniards have so particularly excelled. Facing him is a finely carved angel, with a cup in the right hand and a cross in the left, and behind him the Apostles Peter, James, and John, plunged in the most realistic slumbers.



The Holy Week Procession at Seville. The Prayer in the Garden.

[To face p. 120]

Holy Week Procession in Seville

It might be objected at first sight that there is a great similarity in these various groups, but in reality they differ in their own special points of excellence as much as the treatment of sacred subjects by the old masters. Moreover, each occupies itself with a different incident of Christ's Passion, so that if we watch the passage of all the groups we are enabled to see the whole story enacted before our eyes, almost as dramatically as in any of the old mystery plays. The fact that the figures are dressed and painted in natural colours adds much to the realism of the scene.

The Nazarene of the Prayer in the Garden may be taken as an excellent type of the costume which has been worn at the procession ever since it was instituted, except that dainty shoes have now superseded the bare feet which used to be considered an indispensable proof of penitence. The white tunic was also, doubtless, far less spick and span in times when the Nazarenes flogged themselves publicly throughout the procession until they streamed with blood. The cloak and hood cannot

The Romance of Religion

have differed very greatly, however. During the procession a Nazarene will pick up the tail of his cloak and carry it over his arm. Before the start you can see him rolling cigarettes complacently, with the flap of his hood turned back, but presently he lets it down like a visor, and then you may only descry his eyes by coming very close and searching for the narrow slits. Surely no costume could afford a more effective disguise at carnival-time.

Now comes a Nazarene of the Confraternity of Our Father Jesus of the Three Falls. He is carrying one of the favourite emblems intended to proclaim the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin—a doctrine which has been cherished at Seville with fierce fervour for centuries. The words "*sine labe concepta*" (conceived without sin) are richly embroidered in gold upon a velvet banner of unique shape, which is paraded upon a pole.

The origin of the name of Nazarene is not positively known. Some derive it from the name



Nazarene of the Confraternity of our Father Jesus of the Three Falls.

[To face p. 123.

Holy Week Procession in Seville

applied by the Jews to Jesus of Nazareth ; others identify it with the word applied to contemplative hermits in Christ's day. The different confraternities wear different cloaks and hoods, and are distinguished by the shields, worked in leather, on the breast. Those of the Prayer in the Garden are a chalice upon a cross. Nazarenes were formerly divided into Brethren of the Blood, who flogged themselves, and Brethren of the Light, who carried tapers. Now the flagellation has been put down, at least in public, and all carry candles. These candles are a fruitful source of revenue to the confraternities, for the ends are greedily bought up by the faithful, who consider them a potent charm against lightning, and, if lighted at a death-bed, a sure passport to heavenly bliss.

Perhaps the most realistic *paso* of all is that which represents Christ bearing the cross on His way to Calvary ; and as we look at it we seem to realise the immense weight of the burthen. He appears actually to stagger beneath

The Romance of Religion

it, and the attitude of the feet, with the right one pressing forward upon the toes, conveys an impression of slow, arduous motion better than any work of art I know. The face is also an inspired model of saintly patience, and the only criticism which suggests itself is that, according to our notions, the embroidered robe is grotesquely out of keeping. It is related of an Archbishop of Seville some years ago that, after admiring the image for a long time in silence, he exclaimed, "It has but one fault." His companions, who conceived the figure to be faultless, expressed the utmost curiosity to learn what his Grace's criticism would be, whereupon he added, "The one thing lacking is that it does not breathe!" The figure of Simon of Cyrene is also well executed, and the gilded stand is magnificent, though in quite a modern way.

It is curious to notice how carefully the various parts of the body have been moulded, though they are all covered from the public gaze. In some cases the figures are mere artists' models,

Holy Week Procession in Seville

excepting only the parts which are to be visible. In other cases the images were probably venerated before there was any idea of clothing them or carrying them in a procession. The arms have, however, been dislocated to facilitate the dressing, and a piece of iron has been attached to Christ's left shoulder in order to attach the cross. The care of the wardrobe of an image in Spain is as elaborate as that of a Sovereign, and all sorts of ceremonies are maintained for donning and doffing the clothes.

It is, for instance, a very strict rule that no man may dress or undress an image of the Virgin, such as that of Our Lady of Supreme Grief, whose magnificent mantle, although only presented to the confraternity in 1873, is probably the richest and most admired of all the wonderful treasury of vestments to be found in Seville. It took seven years to make, and cost well over £4,000.

The *paso* of the Confraternity of the Sacred Descent from the Cross and Fifth Agony of

The Romance of Religion

Mary Most Holy is the work of the famous sculptor, Roldan, and enjoys a just reputation. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are letting down the Body of the Saviour with linen bands; the Virgin and S. John (who is always dressed in green) stand at the foot of the ladders, while S. Mary Magdalen and the other Mary are kneeling and holding out a sheet of the finest linen to receive the Body. The act of the Descent is very well rendered, down to the smallest muscular detail. The stand, on which the group is taken out, is also of great artistic merit. It is of cedar-wood, adorned with the various attributes of the Passion and the shields of the religious orders, which have been incorporated in the confraternity.

Another *paso* belongs to the Confraternity of Our Father Jesus of the Three Falls, and represents Our Lady of Loreto enshrined behind a blaze of candles. Her image is a very sympathetic reproduction of the best type of Andalusian beauty, with its combination of dignity and

Holy Week Procession in Seville

charm. The clothing is enriched with a wealth of precious jewels, and the crown alone is worth £1,500.

According to our notions the turmoil of this procession, with its armies of masqueraders, Roman soldiers, Nazarenes, tipstaffs, military bands, emblems, torches, and candles, savours more of a carnival than of the celebration of the most sacred of the Christian mysteries; but there can be no doubt that a great wave of enthusiastic devotion is inspired throughout the whole native population, and there can be no lover of the mediæval and the picturesque—to put it on the lowest ground—but would bewail its discontinuance in obedience to the spread of modern utilitarian ideas. Far from any prospect of this, however, the procession increases every year in grandeur and magnificence, and neither national calamities nor the spirit of the age have yet contrived to impair its ancient glory.

CHAPTER X

THE PASSION PROCESSION AT MURCIA

THE Middle Ages die hardest in Murcia. There are many who think that this wonderful survival ought to be walled in and only shown to favoured visitors, provided with tickets, and that at long intervals. But such precautions are scarcely needed in a province where all cherish the same ideas and habits, cling to the same traditions, accept the same blind faith, and do honour to it with the same antiquated magnificence as their fathers have observed for centuries. It would need a lifetime of patient observation to penetrate the fringe of a Murcian's conservative character, but we may at least gain

The Passion Procession at Murcia

an inkling of the picturesqueness of his creed by mingling with the crowds which congregate in his streets to reverence the outdoor ceremonies of Holy Week.

Chief among these, and more interesting because less hackneyed than the pageants of Seville, is the ancient Good Friday procession, with its wonderful sculptured groups (masterpieces of the unique Spanish art of coloured wood-carving), comprising as they do the most famous works of the immortal Salzillo. Before describing these marvellous creations of that mighty mediæval genius, and the no less imposing fervour and enthusiasm of the assembled Murcians, it may be interesting to trace the origin and development of the foremost among their many religious functions.

As far back as Christian history can trace, the Murcians have afforded special devotion and respect to the various holy brotherhoods, which, in spite of every change and turmoil in the outside world, are still almost unchanged down to the

The Romance of Religion

minutest particular. In Moorish times, Christians were relegated to a suburb, much as Jews have been confined to a Ghetto in most Christian kingdoms. This had its inconveniences, but it served to make the conquered people cling more closely together and cherish more tenaciously than ever their various religious institutions. Among these was the famous hermitage of the miraculous Virgin of the Arrixaca. Near this another hermitage was established in 1475 (the year of the bubonic plague), in honour of San Sebastian, to whose intervention the staying of the epidemic was ascribed. In 1675 both the plague and (to the grave disapproval of a contemporary historian) the saint's intervention had been forgotten, and the neighbouring Augustin convent obtained authority from the bishop to demolish the Hermitage of San Sebastian and build a chapel of their own. But another religious body intervened and, after acute litigation, obtained the site where the existing Hermitage of Jesus was set up.

The Passion Procession at Murcia

The successful litigant was the "Confraternity of Our Father Jesus, or Brotherhood of the Nazarenes," which had obtained ecclesiastical recognition in the year 1600. One of the special objects of its foundation had been to organise and keep up the annual processions of superb carved groups (known as *pasos*), which we so much admire to-day. The officials comprised a number of "major-domos," generally noblemen, each of whom had the special charge of one of the *pasos*. At first the major-domos were elective, but the same holders of the office were regularly re-elected, and the position soon became hereditary. About 1736 the old *pasos* were replaced by the existing ones, the work of the great master, Salzillo, who was made honorary major-domo and chamberlain of all the *pasos*. He was born in 1707 and died in 1783, after a life of arduous work; no fewer than 1,792 wooden sculptures are ascribed to him, nearly all of them dealing with religious subjects. It is said that, proud as he was of his work, he was prouder

The Romance of Religion

still of his official position as one of the familiars of the Holy Inquisition.

All through the eighteenth century the Confraternity of Jesus received especial support from the various trade guilds of Murcia, the principal ones associating themselves each with one of the *pasos*, and being privileged to carry it in the Good Friday procession. The tailors bore the gigantic group of the Last Supper; the gardeners, that of the Prayer in the Garden. The bakers took up the *paso* of the Kiss of Judas; the weavers, the group of S. Veronica; the carpenters, that of Christ's Fall under the Cross; the shoemakers, that of S. John; and the ropemakers, that of Our Lady of Dolours. All the bearers were dressed in violet, which is the colour of the confraternity, and they carried lighted candles and musical instruments, but no cross.

Tradition says that the procession has been continued every year since 1603, but it is probable that it did not assume precisely its present form

The Passion Procession at Murcia

until 1690. It was only abandoned one year, namely in 1809, when the Government forbade it. At six o'clock on the morning of Good Friday, the standard of the confraternity is displayed at the gate of the hermitage to summon the brethren. According to the primitive statutes they were bound to go barefoot and in silence, without looking to the right hand or the left, under pain of a fine of half a pound of wax.

At the head of the procession came the standard-bearer, accompanied by a number of boys, whose duty it was to proclaim to the crowd that "This is done in remembrance of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ," while others punctuated the sentence with trumpets and bells. Then came the first five *pasos*, borne by the members of the guilds associated with each. Next came the confraternity itself, escorting the *paso* of Our Father Jesus in full state, with loud drums, blaring bugles, and a dazzling blaze of lights. After them came the rest of the *pasos*, borne by their guilds, and finally the clergy in

The Romance of Religion

copies and the representatives of the Sovereign and the bishop. Now, the procession is still much the same as ever, except that it is preceded by a body of mounted gendarmes, and that the brethren now escort all the *pasos* in double file, each holy man wearing a violet hood, which completely covers the head and face, but leaves two slits for the eyes. Round their waists they have a knotted girdle of rope. Instead of going bare-foot as of old, they wear a sort of knitted stocking of white wool as a compromise.

Let us watch the procession as it emerges from the Church of the Confraternity of Jesus. The bearers have not yet let down their hoods over their faces, but we may observe among the crowd some of the brethren who have done so. It is interesting to note what a large number of rude wooden crosses are being paraded by individuals in the crowd, as a simple way of testifying their interest in this time-honoured procession. This is the *paso* of the Kiss of Judas, but the wealth of floral decoration makes

The Passion Procession at Murcia

it difficult to distinguish the figures clearly, as we shall have an opportunity of doing later on.

We will now take each of the *pasos*, or groups, in turn, as they well repay a closer inspection. First comes the representation of the Last Supper. This is the largest and heaviest of all the *pasos*, but is generally considered the weakest in execution. It weighs over a ton and a quarter, and requires twenty-four strong bearers during the procession. The honour of sharing in this task is eagerly coveted, and, owing to a curious old custom, handsomely remunerated. After the procession is over, a sumptuous repast is served to the figures, every kind of delicacy being offered by the richest people of the neighbourhood. This strange banquet to wooden figures consists of lambs roasted whole, fat capons, creams, fruits, game, &c. These excellent comestibles are later on sold by auction, and fetch exceptionally high prices, as, owing to the sanctity of their association, they are supposed to bring particular good fortune to those who

The Romance of Religion

consume them. The proceeds are then divided among the bearers of the Last Supper group. So minutely have all the points been investigated which concern this strange procession that each of the figures in the Last Supper has actually been weighed separately. I need not enumerate the details, but it may be curious to note that the Saviour weighs $83\frac{1}{2}$ lb., S. Peter 101 lb., S. James the Less 112 lb. (the top weight this), and Judas Iscariot $105\frac{1}{2}$ lb. The Saviour has the lightest weight of all. Many of the details of the group are open to criticism. Christ's chair, for instance, belongs to the Louis XV. period, if it belongs to any. The stools of the Apostles are such as might have been seen in aristocratic drawing-rooms at the time of Salzillo himself. Moreover, the group is anything but historically accurate. The Jews celebrated their Passover standing up, with their loins girt, and with staffs in their hands. Again, if the Last Supper were not the Jewish Passover, but rather a family meal, the positions would have been recumbent

The Passion Procession at Murcia

In no case could seats have been used as they are here represented. Moreover, Christ would not have occupied the end, but the middle of the table. Still, if Salzillo errs in these respects, he errs in good company, as Titian, Raphael, Tintoretto, Leonardo da Vinci, and all the other old masters made the same mistake—namely, that of representing the Last Supper as suppers were represented in their own day. But the expression of the figures is little short of sublime. That of the Saviour is full of majesty and loving-kindness, and the Apostles are as natural as they are dignified.

The next *paso* represents the Agony in the Garden, and is considered the finest of all. It is known as “the pearl of Salzillo.” To my thinking it would have been more impressive without the gilt throne, added in 1893, and the somewhat theatrical cloak with which the Saviour is clothed for the procession. Still, each figure is a transcendent masterpiece, and no touch of modern vulgarity can impair its beauty. The

The Romance of Religion

angel Gabriel is pointing out a golden chalice in the palm tree, and the best critics consider that he has no equal in wood-sculpture anywhere in the world. It is related at Murcia that the Duke of Wellington offered £80,000 for the angel alone, but I have not been able to discover any convincing authority for the statement. The expression of the Saviour is strikingly human, and the sleeping Apostles are unequalled in their realism. There is a curious legend with respect to Salzillo's execution of this group, and the custodians at Murcia firmly believe that it was a supernatural creation—at any rate, so far as the design is concerned. When Salzillo had determined upon this *passo*, we are told, he made several sketches, none of which satisfied him. One night, however, when he was working late, and beginning to despair about accomplishing anything satisfactory, there came a knock at his door. "Who is there?" he asked. "A poor man who does not belong to this earth," was the reply—"one who craves a night's lodging."

The Passion Procession at Murcia

Salzillo often received such requests, and had a room which he was accustomed to place at the disposal of the homeless. So he ushered his guest in, locked him up, and retired to rest. Next morning he found on his table the design which was actually used for this group, and, when he unlocked the door of his guest-chamber, the visitor had disappeared. When he showed the design to the confraternity, it was welcomed with enthusiasm, and he proceeded to execute this *paso*, which afterwards contributed most to his fame. In connection with this group, the accounts of the confraternity are curious. I find among them the following items: Cloak for Jesus, £200; crown, £120; sword of S. Peter, £3; gilt chalice, £20; which items certainly show that the authorities were not niggardly in furnishing the groups.

The third group shown is known as "The Kiss of Judas." Here the various figures are much larger and nearly twice as heavy as those of the Last Supper. The ground is represented

The Romance of Religion

by cork, and on close inspection matches badly with the solid realism of the figures. Critics may also draw attention to the Roman soldier's armour, which is that of the sixteenth century ; and also to the costume of Malchus, which, with its blue and white striped stockings, recalls that of Murcian peasants a hundred years ago. It is likewise pointed out that the smiting of the servant of the high priest was not simultaneous with the kiss of Judas, and ought not therefore to be represented in the same group. But as the second incident is depicted at the back, that surely implies the short lapse of time suggested in the Gospel narrative. And in any case it seems a pity to carp at details, when the work of art is so very beautiful as a whole. Judas has his left arm round the waist of the Saviour, and his right hand on the Saviour's right shoulder, while the Christ himself, cheerfully accepting the traitor's kiss, places His left arm round Judas's waist. The Saviour's face is admirable in its expression of dignity and disap-

The Passion Procession at Murcia

pointment, but that of Judas is perhaps even more successfully rendered. It is sufficiently repulsive without being overdone, the sculptor having evidently realised that the contrast of the Saviour's face in such close proximity with that of Judas (both were carved out of the same piece of wood) sufficed to emphasise the coarse, sordid features of the betrayer; S. Peter's uplifted arm is also specially admired by all good judges. Indeed, it is related that a German tourist recently offered £1,000 for this limb alone. The saint's attitude is also very skilfully rendered as he bends forward trying to see how he may best deliver his blow in the uncertain light. It is in details of this kind that the peculiar excellence of Salzillo's art stands revealed.

Another group represents the Flagellation. Here, again, are the usual historical improbabilities. The usage was for one man only to wield a four-thonged whip, and the sufferer was certainly never tied to a pillar in the way here represented. Nor is the workmanship so good as in

The Romance of Religion

the other *pasos*. The Saviour wears no particular expression. Not only does He exhibit no fear or shrinking, but there is no suggestion of resignation in the presence of an outrage. Were Christ depicted merely in the act of washing His hands, He could not appear more unmoved. Some have thought that this figure cannot be the work of Salzillo, but tradition attributes it to him, and even recalls a charcoal-burner and market-porter, who are alleged to have posed as models for the two executioners.

The fifth *paso* represents S. Veronica, who held a handkerchief to the Saviour's face while on His way to Calvary, and received upon it the imprint of His sacred face. Next comes the Fall Beneath the Cross. It is interesting to note here that the ruffian with the club was taken from the same model as the sublime angel in the group of the Agony in the Garden. The mailed warrior is in the garb of Spain during the Middle Ages, and Simon of Cyrene is dressed like any Murcian peasant of

The Passion Procession at Murcia

last century. This was Salzillo's last work, and he has here perhaps been most successful in his rendering of the Saviour's face, which is at the same time grander and more sublime than in any other of his sculptures. The seventh *paso*, known as that of "Our Father Jesus," is the special insignia of the confraternity itself. It is imposing enough in a procession—perhaps even the most imposing of all; but at close quarters it suffers a good deal from the tawdriness of its decorations and the profusion of varnish, which has not spared even the face. The confraternity possesses three magnificent brocaded cloaks, which this image wears, one during this procession and the others on the two other annual occasions when it is taken abroad. The eighth *paso* is a life-sized statue of S. John the Evangelist, on a throne supported by two poles, requiring twelve men for the procession. It is among the most admired of Salzillo's works, and in it he has avoided his usual error of representing a Jew of the first century with short hair.

The Romance of Religion

Finally, there comes the famous statue of our Lady of Dolours, the face of which is considered by many judges to be the finest treatment which this subject has ever received. One story is that Salzillo took his wife as his model for this Virgin, and, in order to obtain an expression of the utmost possible anguish, suddenly accused her of a dreadful crime. Another version is that his daughter was his model, and that he obtained the desired expression by bringing in a forged letter announcing the suicide of the man she was engaged to marry. In either case the ruse has proved astoundingly successful, and no praise could be too high for the artist's success in seizing a look of supreme sorrow. I am certainly free to confess that this last image moved me far more than any of its predecessors, wonderful as they are. Some have thought that the gorgeous vestments worn by the image are not in keeping with the subject; but in my eyes they served to heighten the effect, as did also the wealth of flowers, the clouds of incense, the

The Passion Procession at Murcia

blazing candles, the tumult of musical instruments, and the devout enthusiasm of the crowd. It was impossible not to be profoundly impressed by this strange, old-world procession, which carried me back hundreds of years into the Dark Ages, with all their majesty and mystery. But what moved me most was that face of inexpressible anguish and those haunting eyes, from whose mute misery I feel that I shall never altogether escape.

CHAPTER XI

OUR LADY OF LUXEMBURG

THE pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Luxemburg is one of the most popular in those northern lands which profess Roman Catholicism, and though, perhaps, like many others, it is less famous than in past centuries, that is probably because pilgrims are not so zealous as in days of old. The ordinary tourist has never heard of it, for Cook does not spread its fame abroad, nor do the guide-books mention it. But whoever finds himself in the strange old city of Luxemburg on the Sunday before Ascension Day will find every room in every inn occupied by pious visitors, and the streets

Our Lady of Luxemburg

thronged with every type of the country, both gentle and simple, besides thousands of strangers from France, Belgium, and Germany.

Indeed there are few more romantic pilgrimage cities than the capital of the Grand Duchy. It is most curiously situated on the edge of the wonderful craggy cliffs which rise so precipitously and which have been strengthened and fortified by generation after generation of military commanders. In spite of its many attractions, and although it is on the high-road from Ostend to Basle, you will not find many English there, for they seem sadly to neglect this little pocket capital.

Luxemburg is a city you can never forget, for as you drive from the station to the town the romantic scene seems to photograph itself on your brain. From the point of view of the picturesque there are few capitals to beat it, with its quaint old pepperpot towers and houses huddled together on the rocky plateau, the valley like a gigantic moat spanned by the viaduct in place of a drawbridge. A stream runs at the

The Romance of Religion

foot of the cliffs bordered on either side by old-fashioned houses and frequented by flocks of geese and ducks.

Almost every one in Luxemburg is a Roman Catholic, and the famous image of Our Lady, Comforter of the Distressed, is an object of fervent adoration. This statue has been preserved in Luxemburg many hundreds of years, and, as is generally the case with miraculous images, its origin is wrapped in mystery. Tradition says that it was found in a hollow tree by a priest who was out walking one day in charge of a school of boys. They took it triumphantly to the college chapel and placed it on the altar, but it disappeared mysteriously in the night, and the next day was found in the place it had first chosen. This phenomenon happened every time it was brought back to the college, so at last the clergy of Luxemburg, perceiving that the statue had quite made up its mind where it wished to reside, built a chapel over the spot, and there it has remained to this day.



Our Lady of Luxembourg holding the key of the city.

[To face p. 148.]

Our Lady of Luxemburg

The image is made of wood and is about three feet high. Though it cannot be considered a work of the highest art, there is something pleasing about the attitude and expression. Unfortunately the ancient garments which noble ladies of the seventeenth century had embroidered for it and the costly jewels they offered at its shrine were seized and sold by the Republican troops, who invaded Luxemburg and captured the city during the French Revolution.

Still Our Lady of Luxemburg has an ample wardrobe of modern make and possesses many valuable jewels. On *fête* days she is clad in gorgeous brocade, covered with embroideries of white lilies and stiff with gold thread work. Many are the miracles said to have been wrought at her shrine in bygone days, and many tales are told of how the blind saw, the deaf heard, and even the dead were restored to life.

Any one who has been at Luxemburg during the octave can testify to the popularity of the procession.

The Romance of Religion

The first thing the pilgrims have to do on their arrival is to purify their hearts and consciences by prayer and confession and then partake of the Holy Eucharist. After that they may visit the chapel containing the miraculous image, and kneeling at its feet return thanks to God for having brought them safely thither. This, of course, is a relic of the days when journeys were perilous, and brigands and bandits lurked in the Ardennes and the Luxemburg hills. Next they implore pardon for their sins and relief from their diseases. To those who undertake this pilgrimage the Pope gives plenary indulgence, and to those who return again during the course of the year and repeat five paters and aves at the shrine of Our Lady he grants five hundred days' indulgence.

The procession of Luxemburg dates from the year 1666, when the city, governed by the Prince de Chimay for the house of Spain, solemnly chose the Virgin Mary to be Mistress and Protectress of the town and vowed to renew its

Our Lady of Luxemburg

homage every year in her chapel. At the same time she was presented with the keys of the town, wrought in solid gold. After the ceremony was over the statue was carried in solemn procession through the streets, reinforced by chariots containing groups of the most varied description. Some of the subjects were Biblical, others mythological, and there were others which would look almost as strange to our eyes as if tableaux from the "Arabian Nights" were given in church, but were then greeted with the utmost enthusiasm.

The Princess de Chimay of that day was a very pious dame, and constituted herself tirewoman to Our Lady. It was she who provided the statue with the most gorgeous raiment, woven of golden tissue and encrusted with precious stones. Moreover, she had a crown made and gave up eight thousand pounds' worth of her own jewels to adorn it.

The procession took place annually with a few breaks until the terrible times of the French Revolution, when the Republicans stormed Luxem-

The Romance of Religion

burg, pillaged the sanctuaries and abolished all religious ceremonies. It was not until the year 1816 that pilgrims ventured to come to the shrine in great numbers, for they cherished a certain dread of Buonaparte. However, after his overthrow they began to breathe again, and 1816 was almost a record year at Luxemburg. Fifty thousand pilgrims flocked thither, most of whom had to bivouac in the streets as every house was crowded, and the churches were so full that the priests were obliged to hear confessions in the public square.

Everybody is about early on the morning of the procession-day. The houses are gaily decorated with flags flying on all hands, wreaths and festoons of flowers enliven the walls, banners hang across the street from house to house, and in every window are preparations for illuminations. All along the streets are Christmas-trees, which give a delightfully green look to the town. Business is, of course, set aside for the day, every shop is closed, and all Luxemburg is at its

Our Lady of Luxemburg

windows or elbowing its way through the surging streets.

The children are the most excited, especially the small and pretty ones who are to figure as angels in fresh white frocks with flowery wreaths on their elaborately frizzed heads. They strut past with great ideas of their importance, some with big bouquets, whilst others more highly honoured carry gaily embroidered banners.

The army of Luxemburg also takes part in the procession. Part of it goes in front of the clergy, choristers, and acolytes, and gives an imposing and official appearance to the *cortège*. This sounds much more important than it really is, and implies hordes of warriors marching in long lines through the town. As a matter of fact the Grand Duchy possesses but one regiment consisting of a couple of hundred men, really a kind of constabulary. They march along with an officer in front and effectually clear the way for the procession. Others follow behind the clergy, some mounted, some on foot, and the

The Romance of Religion

bright uniforms give another touch of colour to the scene.

The students provide the musical part of the programme. It is true they are not very ornamental in their tweed suits and sailor hats, but they organise a lusty if not highly trained band, and their efforts are at any rate appreciated by their friends and relations in the crowd. Lawyers and other dignitaries of the town do not disdain to play their part as well. Indeed they are as eager as any for the success of the pilgrimage. Perhaps in their hearts they are glad when the sky is not cloudless, for the high caps they wear are not much protection against the sun; and its rays beat down mercilessly in Luxemburg in May. They are, however, luckier than the priests, who must walk bareheaded and seem to be inviting a sunstroke.

In a corner of the principal street a beautiful altar is erected in the open air, and it is curious to see the crowds kneeling before it, offering up their prayers in the public streets. A thick wall



Children go about at night with lighted tapers.

Our Lady of Luxemburg

of evergreens forms a background, and on each side are palms, fir trees, and pots of flowers. Several steps lead up to the altar, which is covered with a beautiful cloth and hung with rich embroideries. An image of the Virgin and Child, surrounded by great candles and vases of flowers, adorns it, and two statues of angels guard it on either side. Here the pilgrims come to offer their gifts of flowers.

The Luxemburg crowd is a well-behaved and reverent one, and all along the line you will find few men who do not uncover as the procession passes along.

One of the prettiest sights to be seen during the octave is the crowd of small children in the streets in the evening, going from house to house with lighted tapers singing hymns and songs. Here is a troop of children bursting into a shop to serenade the owners. They sing dear little *Plat deutsch* songs, some of them very quaint. This becomes somewhat tiresome after a while, for there are often several thousand

The Romance of Religion

children about, and as Luxemburg is not a large town they seem to pervade the place; nevertheless it is a graceful idea. The children of the Grand Duchy are nice, cheerful little beings; the girls are generally very pretty with golden hair and blue eyes, and the boys have bright, intelligent faces.

Another very curious sight about the time of the procession is at the Kermesse. Here is a butcher dressed up in his finest smock with bunches of ribbons and flowers in his buttonhole and rosettes adorning his hat, whilst his crook is similarly decorated. His unfortunate flock are dressed up in the most ludicrous way, with wreaths of flowers and ribbons. They look rather ashamed of themselves, though an old ram with a gay garland tilted coquettishly over one ear fancies himself quite the dog.



Luxemburg. Animals dressed by the butchers and adorned with flowers and ribbons.

[To face p. 156.]

CHAPTER XII

AN OPERA IN A CATHEDRAL

THE Feast of the Assumption is one of the most popular of all the high days observed in Catholic countries, more especially in Spain, which has always regarded herself as being under the direct protection of the Blessed Virgin. But of all the celebrations of this great day, in Spain or elsewhere, there are probably few so pretty, so fanciful, and so frankly mediæval as that which may be witnessed at Elche, the European oasis, the lovely little Arab garden-town, which the Jinns have transported into the midst of the giaours.

Elche, which has been called the Jerusalem of

The Romance of Religion

Spain, is only a few minutes by rail from Alicante. It is pre-eminent in its Christian fervour, although it stands in a province which has been much tainted with freethought and is in appearance so like a town of the followers of the Prophet. This fervour is attributed to the special favour bestowed upon Elche by Our Lady of the Assumption, who sent her miraculous image over the seas in a magnificent chest with a cover inscribed, "*Soy para Elche*" (I am for Elche).

This chest having drifted all the way from Palestine, was found on the 29th of December, 1370, by a coastguard named Canto, who was strolling along the banks of the river Tamario. Thereupon the image was introduced into the city with great ceremony, and finally installed, some sixteen years later, in the present cathedral, where innumerable miracles have been ascribed to its efficacy. Like many other images, it is thought to have been carved by S. Luke, though it possesses small artistic merits ac-

An Opera in a Cathedral

according to modern notions. Some have put about a rumour that its head, feet, and hands have alone been carved, but this must be mere malevolent guess-work, for the image is very jealously guarded all the year in the cathedral, and, when exhibited to the faithful, is always arrayed in the fullest and most gorgeous clothing, as a visitor may see for himself. In any case it remains the object of extraordinary veneration. Its jewels and wardrobes are of enormous value; and it is actually the sole possessor of numerous palm-groves and houses, which may be recognised by a blue slab over their doorways bearing the monogram "M.V." surmounted by a crown. The image is said to have been painted in the first instance, and now undergoes frequent restoration at the hands of local artists. On the rare occasions of its processions it is borne through the streets on a stand. A crescent moon is at the Virgin's feet, a splendid jewelled tiara is placed upon her head, the magnificent brocaded mantle is a

The Romance of Religion

triumph of ecclesiastical needlework, and we may notice the dainty lace frills at the wrists of her hands, which are joined in the attitude of prayer.

How Elche came to organise an opera in her cathedral in honour of this figure of the Virgin has been forgotten in the lapse of centuries. But a legend remains that the libretto was found in the chest which brought the image over the seas. The opera is performed every year on the 14th and 15th of August (the eve and feast of the Assumption), and is undoubtedly of great antiquity. Incongruous though the performance may seem, there is absolutely nothing irreverent about it. It is simply a very ancient custom. On the 10th of August preparations for the great performance are begun, the cathedral being given over to carpenters, who rapidly change it into an opera-house. First of all, every sacred image and religious ornament is removed from the altars and nave. A rude wooden platform is then set up in front of the high altar to form the stage, and a long, low

An Opera in a Cathedral

stand, provided with curtains and red armchairs, is erected for the accommodation of the chief municipal dignitaries. The stage is surrounded by wooden railings, which flank the steps, and are continued right down the nave to the chief entrance. The scenery is of the simplest, and as was the case in most mediæval play-acting, requires a good stretch of the imagination to eke it out. There is a little tumble-down cave to depict the Garden of Gethsemane, a plain coffin for the Holy Sepulchre, and, up on the roof, a blue cloth with rough designs of cloud and angels bearing harps, to represent the heavens, into which the Virgin will presently ascend in all her glory.

There is a tremendous bustle to complete the transformation of the cathedral in time, and by the evening of the 13th we find the whole town agog with excitement. The streets are crowded with men, women, and children, who all seem to have provided themselves with fireworks; and on the flat roofs, still more densely thronged

The Romance of Religion

with eager spectators, long rows of Chinese lanterns and a profusion of Bengal lights add to the natural glamour of the scene. All are in the highest spirits, laughing and chattering as only Spaniards can, or improvising strange romantic songs to dreamy, half-Moorish airs upon their guitars. As the evening wears on, the animation increases. Then there is a hush of expectation, and at last the first stroke of midnight is rung out by the automaton of the town clock. We then behold a curious sight, the whole population—in the streets, in their rooms, on the housetops, or wherever they may be—prostrating themselves on their faces and reciting prayers to inaugurate the two days' festival, while the bells of every church burst forth into a joyous peal. The cathedral, which has stood out in darkness save for a faint light that could be discerned through a chink in the door, is quickly illuminated over the dome.

At last, on the 14th, the great doors are swung open, and it seems as if the whole

An Opera in a Cathedral

population sought to surge in at once. Never, surely, was there such a scramble for seats. A choir has found accommodation in the pulpit, and a number of privileged spectators—chiefly the municipal authorities and their families—have been bestowed in the gallery above the chancel; but down below it is a case of first come first served, and the rush would appal many were it not for the intense attraction inspired by this great annual ceremony. The boys, as usual in Spain, are irrepressible, and you may soon see them scrambling like monkeys up on to the windows and cornices—even on to the font and side altars—in their zeal to secure the best coign of vantage. The scene is one of frightful hubbub, which seems as though it would never die down. All are laughing, singing, and chattering to their hearts' content, apparently forgetful that this theatre has ever been a place of worship. Again I say, there is nothing really irreverent in all this.

After long and uncomfortable waiting we find

The Romance of Religion

the restlessness of our neighbours arrested, and all necks are craned to catch incomplete glimpses of a procession of the performers. These are all in a great hurry, and jostle each other with little regard for their dignity, so that we do not distinguish them all; but we catch a glimpse of the Virgin escorted by Martha, Mary Magdalene, and the other Marys, also a bodyguard of diminutive angels. Mary, the mother of James, has a really saintly expression, and wears a suitable costume, but her cardboard halo with her name inscribed conspicuously upon it affords a certain shock at first. The angels are very small girls, with their hair painfully pomaded and curled, and decorated with paper flowers, about as decorative as curl-papers. Some of them have great wings of gilt cardboard, and they are all dressed in ill-fitting white linen, with a profusion of sashes and coloured paper flowers. They are much more shy than one imagines angels should be, but the Marys are decidedly dignified. The Virgin herself is a pretty boy of eleven or



An Opera in a Cathedral. Leading Performers, Marys, and Angels.

[To face p. 164.

An Opera in a Cathedral

twelve, dressed in blue silk, with a white cambric kerchief folded over the head.

The procession is greeted with a strain of song from the choir, strangely Moorish, almost barbaric, in fact, and altogether surprising in a Christian cathedral. The Virgin recites a long mediæval poem as she advances, but no one understands it, and there is a buzz of conversation as the congregation ply their pretty fans. When at last she reaches the stage, she kneels down upon a bed covered with silver brocade and rich cushions, where she proceeds to invoke death. Thereupon the heaven (that is to say, the blue cloth in the roof) opens, and, amid a great peal of bells and a rain of gold-leaf, the *mangrana*, or celestial grenade, is let down very gently. It is a large blue globe painted with the winged heads of cherubim. It opens and an angel steps out, holding a piece of music in her hand. As soon as silence is obtained she proceeds to sing a salutation in a wonderfully clear, fresh voice. She announces that Mary's prayer

The Romance of Religion

for death has been heard, and hands her a golden palm, which shall be carried before her at her funeral.

Through the dim, religious light and the excited movement of the crowd, all plying their fans with frantic vigour, the Virgin may be descried kneeling bolt upright. On her left are a soldier, who appears somewhat of an intruder, and various other performers waiting to come on, while two priests, seated within the rails with their backs to the congregation, confer an ecclesiastical sanction upon the amazing spectacle. The "grenade" has just been opened, leaving a large throne-like chair, surmounted by a sort of canopy resembling a parachute.

Mary now asks, as a last favour, to be permitted to behold the Apostles once more, and while the grenade is being drawn up into heaven again they arrive upon the stage clad in faded silk, ragged wigs, and grotesque cardboard haloes bearing their names. S. Peter's beard is painfully unreal and his key is unduly large; Thad-



An Opera in a Cathedral. The Apostles.

[To face p. 166.

An Opera in a Cathedral

dæus resembles a Red Indian squaw, and, with the exception perhaps of S. John, they all look very commonplace beings and the reverse of apostolic. Indeed the get-up of some of them seems uncomfortably suggestive of Chinese mandarins. A bandmaster steps to the front, strangely incongruous in his swallow-tail coat, and shakes his fist at the Apostles in a determined effort to compel them to keep time. They all hold their music ostentatiously before them, and so does the Virgin; but the audience, who have seen it all so often before, do not perceive any incongruity, and, after all, it seems to add to the artless simplicity of the whole impression. The Apostles gather round the deathbed singing a strange and very ancient dirge. Mary answers with a sweet little recitative, then suddenly falls back and dies; thereupon the Apostles seize her and push her down a trap into the floor, amid the indescribable emotion of the congregation.

No sooner has she disappeared than her place

The Romance of Religion

is taken by the miraculous image of Our Lady. Heaven then opens again and the celestial altar comes down, escorted by an angel in white and two middle-aged cherubim playing upon the harp and the guitar, while two more angels are strumming upon mandolines. The soul of the Virgin is then produced. It is a doll dressed in white, with long, black hair streaming over the shoulders and a crown of gilt cardboard on the head.

This doll is placed upon the altar and drawn up into heaven, while bells and every kind of musical instrument set up a tremendous din. The first day's play is now at an end, and the crowd streams slowly out.

Let us take advantage of the respite to climb up the church tower and examine the remarkable system of ropes and pulleys, with which the various "grenades," celestial altars, saints, and angels are enabled to ascend and descend to and from the stage. It is certainly very ingeniously contrived, and, though the abyss, when the trap-

An Opera in a Cathedral

door is opened, must afford considerable alarm to the younger performers, they really have nothing to fear. It is a stiff climb up to the top, and I was inclined to wish I had asked to ascend in the celestial grenade, but I felt compensated for my labour by the exquisite view over the nodding palm-groves and glistening white houses of the oasis of Elche.

During the night of the 14th the miraculous image is laid out upon the deathbed with an array of candles all round it, and crowds come thither to offer up prayers, make vows, and bring offerings of candles. All night and far into the next morning the procession of the devout continues. Later on the image is taken out of the church, wrapped in a heavy mantle of silver and gold, and borne upon a litter of silk through the streets of the town, preceded by the banner of the Virgin, and escorted by priests, actors, and the municipal band playing the Spanish national anthem. The crowds kneel at the passage of the figure, or throng to kiss the hem of its mantle.

The Romance of Religion

In the afternoon the Virgin has returned for the second act of the drama. The scenery is the same, except that there is now a hole to represent the Virgin's tomb. While the burial is in progress the heavenly altar comes down again with an angel holding the soul of Mary.

Just as the altar is being let down into the tomb, S. Thomas appears and exclaims, "Oh, how great a misadventure! I am inconsolably sad not to have been present at this holy funeral. I pray you, most excellent Virgin, hold me excused. I was detained by the Indians." But no one seems to pay much attention to him, for the heavens have opened and the Trinity have come down amid a rain of gold-leaf. The Father (represented by one of the priests of the cathedral) wears the traditional long, white beard. There is a symbolical triangle of cardboard on his head, and he holds a crown upon his knees. The Son and Holy Ghost standing beside his throne are two choir-boys. The Trinity pauses in the air not far from the roof, and Mary comes out of

An Opera in a Cathedral

her tomb at once. We recognise again the small boy who played her part originally.

She stretches out her hands to bless the crowd and is slowly drawn up, reclining on the altar. As she receives her crown the bells, the organ, and all manner of musical instruments emit a joyful tumult. The crowd is wild with excitement, praying, weeping, and applauding enthusiastically. Meanwhile S. John is engaged in cutting up the golden palm into small pieces, which he distributes as relics. The figures disappear into heaven, and the priests and Apostles strike up a triumphant "Glory be to the Father."

Next morning the cathedral has resumed its normal aspect and every trace of the theatre has disappeared. But in front of the high altar a platform has been erected and surrounded with flowers and candles. Upon it is a sumptuous ebony bed, richly adorned with silver, given by the Duke of Baños in 1754. Here the miraculous image of Our Lady of the Assumption is

The Romance of Religion

exposed during the octave, and pilgrims come from far and near to revere it or to benefit by one of the many miraculous cures which have been recorded.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PARDON OF S. ANNE D'AURAY

“Amour, amour pour sainte Anne à jamais.
Pour toi, sainte Anne, ô bienheureuse mère
De l'auguste Reine des Cieux !
Pour toi, sainte Anne, amour toujours sincère,
Dans tous les temps, dans tous les lieux.”

I WAS in the centre of a very dense throng. A great wave of religious fervour swept through the souls of ten or twenty thousand Breton peasants, hymning S. Anne with uncouth accent. We swayed and rippled on the wide meadow like an agitated lake ; though physically uncomfortable, we breathed a general benevolence. From the pilgrimage church over the

The Romance of Religion

way a long procession was advancing sedately towards the Scala Sancta, a high, solitary bridge which reminded me of the Rialto. Bright banners were puffed out by the breeze; the golden image of S. Anne, borne on a litter by four widows, swayed unsteadily; and afar off I perceived a statue of the Blessed Virgin, in charge of four stalwart maidens, with a prodigious escort of pious folk. The infinite variety of the women's coifs, a distinct fashion from every Breton village, testified to the catholicity of the pilgrimage; files of bright white nuns, bending devoutly beneath enormous hoods, seemed heavenly visitants; while squads of stout sea dogs, whose grim, shorn faces wore the shrewd expression of Spanish chulos or English grooms, contributed a note of sturdy common sense to the poetry of religion. Finally, a stream of choir-boys, ill-drilled, silver-tongued, preceded a score of priests and a couple of bishops amid a haze of incense. At last they drew near to the Rialto. The banners and images grouped themselves beneath the arches,



S. Anne d'Auray. Holy Staircase where Pilgrims crawl on their knees.

[To face p. 174.]

The Pardon of S. Anne d'Auray

and the mob, snatching off hats, bowing, curtsying, kneeling convulsively, rolled back in breaking waves to make room, surging with the overflow from the peasants of the procession. Choristers and clergy glided up the Scala Sancta, where, all day long, countless pilgrims had been climbing on their knees, inspired by the promise of nine months' indulgence for every stair. The uproar of the hymn grew terrific—

“ Et nous, Bretons, objet de ta tendresse,
Que ferons-nous pour payer tes bienfaits ?
Nous nous plairons à répéter sans cesse :
Amour, amour pour sainte Anne à jamais.
Pour toi, sainte Anne, ô bienheureuse mère
De l'auguste Reine des Cieux ! ”

Close beside me an old peasant woman, carried away by religious fervour, was bawling the words *à tue-tête* in raucous, tuneless tones. A pretty girl giggled, an old salt remarked that the singer had better go and join the choir upon the stairs, chaff became general, but save for a frown and an occasional “Chut!” the dame was unper-

The Romance of Religion

turbed; doubly vociferous, she roared her hymn, fully half a line behind the rest :

“ Pour toi, sainte Anne, amour toujours sincère,
Dans tous les temps, dans tous les lieux.”

It was a very long service, whereof I remember only the strange effect of the Latin litany, pronounced here with a Breton, there with a French accent, and the allocution of the Curé, which ended with a warning to beware of pickpockets.

In Brittany, ever pious, ever poetical, nothing has changed since the Middle Ages, very little since the days of the Druids. You may witness the cult of ancient Keltic Saints, whose very traditions have passed away. S. Huec, S. Widebote, S. Jubel, S. Judoc—we implore their intercession, though their lives and their miracles were shrouded in oblivion centuries ago. Stones and springs, though they may no longer be openly worshipped, are accepted by the Church as meet to be revered. At the fountain of S. Anne from the beginning to the end of the Pardon

The Pardon of S. Anne d'Auray

are ever-succeeding throngs of halt and sick and lame, leprous and palsied, patiently pressing to drink and wash in full confidence that they shall be made whole. It is a vision of dramatic contrasts. As if to heighten the effect of the boundless faith and hope displayed here, behold the intrusion of clamorous appeals for charity to the undeserving poor. Valiant beggars, every sort of humbug, ragged roughs, light-fingered pilgrims are everywhere, grovelling and whining or demanding alms with the sonorous diction of mummers. By the fountain a sturdy rascal is roaring his complaints in stentorian tones which almost dominate Monseigneur's sermon on the bridge. "Oh! ye charitable souls, I cannot work, pause and have pity," he pleads in anything but piteous tones.

It is the vigil of S. Anne's day and delegations continue to arrive with banners flying all through the long evening far into the summer night. So soon as they perceive the basilica from afar, all prostrate themselves upon the earth

The Romance of Religion

and pray. Then, setting forth again, they sing hymns and chaunt long litanies in honour of S. Anne. Their music never ceases until they reach the cemetery, where those who have made vows must go round three times either bare-foot or on their knees. Strange surprise, they are received by numbers of poor folk, craving to do the penance in their stead. There is a regular tariff for substitutes, and the pilgrims do not delegate the duty as lazy backsliders but believing they are thus fulfilling their vows and doing a charity at the same time. Entering the church, the first duty is to present an offering. Each shrine in Brittany receives traditional gifts, corn or fowls as a rule, sometimes new brooms or nails or locks of hair. For S. Anne candles are in chief request. All night the church is densely filled, and you may observe an enormous overflow kneeling on caps or handkerchiefs outside. Women bring their babies to the long vigil, and many are the discordant cries amid the murmuring prayers. The confessional boxes are

The Pardon of S. Anne d'Auray

besieged and the priests have never an instant's respite in shriving penitents against the early mass.

Meanwhile we must not miss the torchlight procession without. Lo, the twinkling of ten thousand tapers in the darkness, as though the summer sky had come down to earth. Wending their way with song and prayer, the pilgrims reach a mighty pyre, and the clergy advance ceremoniously to kindle the bonfire. On the very top we discern a grotesque figure and learn to our amazement that here is an effigy of Dutch William! How this touch of our own Jacobitism contrived to take root and survive in this remote corner of Brittany, no man knows. But Auray has long been conspicuous as an exponent of the belief that those who fear God must also honour kings. At her Chartreuse is an expiatory chapel containing the bones of victims of the French Revolution, hard by are a *champ des martyres* and the statue of Henri Cinq, and every year on S. Anne's Day the Blancs d'Espagne party, last

The Romance of Religion

remnant of French legitimism, assemble at Auray for fiery speeches and old-world toasts, wherein fidelity drowns despair. The Stuarts, half-forgotten in Britain, are still remembered in Brittany. Queen Mary landed at Roscoff and built a chapel, where Prince Charlie knelt on his return from the forty-five; at Ploërmel the house is still shown where King James slept on his way to Saint Germain; and here at Auray they still mark the memory of William impious, inglorious, immortally. Turning aside from this moving spectacle, we espy S. Anne's Church blazing with light against the skyline, a bright beacon in a dark age of democracy and unbelief.

“Quels doux transports s'élèvent dans mon âme,
Et de quels feux je ressens les ardeurs !
Que je voudrais, de la plus vive flamme,
Pour toi, sainte Anne, embraser tous les cœurs.”

CHAPTER XIV

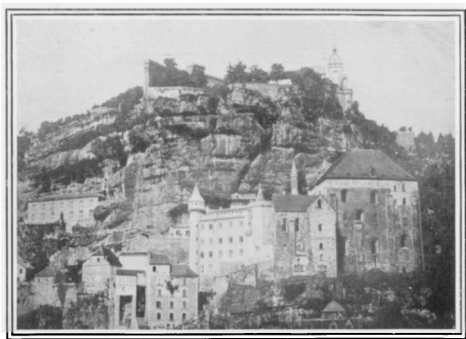
THE BLACK VIRGIN OF ROC-AMADOUR

AMONG the most ancient and remarkable of the holy places which still attract pilgrims in Republican France, the shrine and miraculous image of Our Lady on the romantic mountain of Roc-Amadour, in the Department of Lot, possesses perhaps the most striking ceremonies and romantic associations. According to tradition, this place of pilgrimage was founded by Zacchæus, the publican of the Gospels, who established himself there as a hermit in the first century, and was known to his neighbours as Roc-Amadour, which means the lover of the rock. He is said to have set out from Palestine in an open boat, taking with

The Romance of Religion

him the miraculous image which is still to be seen there, having been guided on his journey by the wind and waves. On his arrival the rock was infested by wild beasts, but in answer to his prayers they withdrew for ever from the district. During his lifetime Zacchæus occupied a small natural cell in the rock, where he was buried in the year 70, and where his body was found in a state of perfect preservation over a thousand years later, in 1166. After this discovery so many miracles were performed by his remains, that all manner of pilgrims hastened thither from far and near. Among them was Henry II. of England, who made a vow that he would be reconciled with Becket if his pilgrimage brought him relief from an illness. He was at once cured, and Becket was restored to his See.

Roc-Amadour, enclosed among precipitous hills, is perched upon a cliff, to the side of which cling houses approached by a winding road. The pilgrimage church dates from the twelfth century, and consisted at one time of twelve sanctuaries grouped



Roc-Amadour.

[To face p. 182.]

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

around a miraculous chapel. Six now remain. The first of these is the Church of the Saviour, a vast basilica where pilgrims still assemble. Beneath this is the underground Church of S. Amadour and four chapels. From the village to the sanctuaries runs a long, steep flight of 216 steps, which pilgrims are expected to ascend on their hands and knees, reciting on each step the "Hail, Mary," and the invocation, "Our Lady of Roc-Amadour, pray for us." The favourite times for pilgrimages are May—the month of Mary—and the octave of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin, from the 8th to the 15th of September. There is then a torchlight procession every evening, which goes far towards realising our notions of fairyland. All along the ramparts and battlements are endless rows of Chinese lanterns of all the most exquisite hues. The cross of Jerusalem, which stands out at the extremity, is a blaze of red, and the whole mountain seems on fire to welcome the pilgrims. These, in enormous crowds, but always in perfect order, are crawling up the steep staircase,

The Romance of Religion

each with a lighted candle in his hand, and, viewed from a distance, they suggest a swarm of fireflies dancing in the breeze. As the pilgrims reach the summit they make their way into the immense natural hall, where a blaze of light almost blinds them after the soft glow of the candles and lanterns in the dusk without. Some have come to implore miraculous relief for their various needs; others have brought votive offerings in return for benefits received; others, again, are dedicating small children to the service of Our Lady of Roc-Amadour. She is the "Star of the Sea," the special patron of sailors, numbers of whom have journeyed hither from long distances to ask a blessing for the coming year. In this age of coldness and scepticism it is a revelation to the traveller to find so much enthusiasm and blind faith thus gathered together in the persons of these fervent pilgrims.

Let us now take a glance round and examine the various sights of the place. Part of the way up the rock is the palace of the Bishop of Cahors, where there is an extraordinary courtyard overhung by

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

stupendous rocks and surrounded by the buildings of the sanctuary. We pass on into the miraculous Chapel of Our Lady, on the site of the original oratory of Zacchæus, which, having been destroyed by the fall of a rock, was replaced by the present chapel in 1479.

On the wall of the chapel are the remains of a curious fresco, which some have taken to represent the Dance of Death, and others have interpreted as depicting the miraculous punishment meted out to defilers of tombs. The subject, as a matter of fact, is really the "Lay of the Three Quick and the Three Dead," in which the poet represented three careless young lords who are conversing about hunting, love, and pleasure, when they are suddenly met by three dead men, who stop them and compel them to listen to serious reflections upon the vanity of human affairs.

The chapel suffered great damage in the sixteenth century from the Huguenots, who burned and ravaged almost everything they could lay hands upon, mutilating the images and making a bonfire

The Romance of Religion

of the relics. Traces of their vandalism are still conspicuous, though a great deal has been done in the way of restoration. Pious hands, however, contrived to save the Miraculous Black Image of the Blessed Virgin, also the miraculous bell and the altar consecrated by S. Martial. The image was rudely hewn out of the trunk of a tree, and is about twenty-nine inches in height. It represents the Virgin seated with the Child on her knee. He holds the Gospels in His hand, and each wears a crown upon the head. Formerly the whole image was covered with a thin layer of silver, but this has now been completely worn away except at the edges of the robe ; and the lapse of ages in an atmosphere heavily charged with the smoke of tapers and incense has turned it completely black, for which reason it is known as the Miraculous Black Virgin.

The records of miracles performed by this image—or, if we prefer so to express it, of prayers which have been heard in its presence—are very numerous ; and, even if we only look upon them as a form of

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

faith-healing, it is impossible altogether to deny them. The altar, with all the votive offerings of those who have received benefits from the image, is alone a speaking testimony ; and there is besides an immense array of crutches, flags, models of limbs, pictures, and other testimonies of gratitude and devotion. The more portable precious offerings were carried off by the Huguenots. The image, clad in a long, flowing robe, occupies the principal position over the centre of the altar, and a stone is still shown which is said to be part of the original altar consecrated by S. Martial when he was sent by S. Peter to Gaul. The miraculous bell, suspended in the dome, enjoys an almost equal celebrity. There is no chain or rope attached to it, for it is believed that it rings miraculously of itself whenever a miracle is being performed by the image either here or elsewhere. For instance, when a sailor, caught by a tempest, makes a despairing appeal to Our Lady of Roc-Amadour, Star of the Sea, she rings her bell in the chapel as a token that the prayers have been heard, and an echo of its peal

The Romance of Religion

often seems to reach him, however far away he may be. Detailed records exist of such occurrences on the 10th of February, 1385; the 20th of July, 1435; 5th of May, 1454; and on eleven other occasions down to the 23rd of September, 1554.

The adjoining Church of the Saviour is a vast edifice of simple and severe architecture. The unusual thing about it is that it possesses two naves. An ancient wooden crucifix standing between two pillars is the only remnant of the monks' choir; and it is always the first duty of pilgrims to come and venerate it as soon as they have concluded the ascent of the long staircase on their hands and knees. Beneath this church is another, dedicated to S. Amadour, whose relics are still preserved there. After remaining incorruptible for fifteen centuries, his body was seized by the Huguenots and placed upon a great fire of logs, in the hope that at length it might be destroyed. The flames, however, are said to have had no more effect upon it than the lapse of time, whereupon the captain in command of the troops seized a blacksmith's hammer and proceeded

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

to belabour it, exclaiming, "Since you will not burn, I will smash you to pieces." It was, however, the hammer which was smashed, and even the Huguenots were abashed when they saw a stream of crimson blood trickle from the body. After their departure, the remains were reverently put into a reliquary, which now stands upon the altar. Behind this altar is a sacristy, which was formerly a cistern, where the rains, percolating through the rock, were collected. The church also contains eight interesting pictures, representing scenes in the life of Zacchæus—how he climbed a sycamore tree to behold the passage of Christ; how he travelled by sea with his wife S. Veronica to the coast of Medoc; how he established himself here as a hermit and preached Christianity to the wild natives; and so on.

Of the other chapels, that of S. Michael is perhaps the most interesting. It has been left and still remains very much like a cavern, with the live rock unadorned for its roof. At its door is a huge iron chest, in which the offerings of the faithful may be deposited. Above it in the wall there is set a rough

The Romance of Religion

imitation of Durandal, the famous sword of Roland, the companion of Charlemagne. The story goes that on his way to the wars in Spain he dedicated his sword to Our Lady of Roc-Amadour, but presently repurchased it for its weight in silver. When he was dying at Roncevalles, he raised it aloft and smote the Pyrenees, which instantly opened at the blow. Then, before he drew his last breath, he cast the sword into the air and it instantly travelled to Roc-Amadour, where it remained until 1183, when Henry of the Short Mantle pillaged the place and carried it off. The present copy was set up in order to afford a permanent record.

From these sanctuaries a secret stairway inside the rock leads up to the castle, which enjoyed a great reputation as a fortress in the Middle Ages. There are 236 stairs, which must have required tremendous labour to construct in the live rock with no other implements than the pick and the hammer. At present the castle serves as a dwelling-place for the priests attached to the service of the sanctuary. If for no other



Grotto of the Agony.

[To face p. 126]

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

reason, it is worth climbing up the summit in order to enjoy the magnificent panorama, which stretches away over fantastic rocks and the smiling valley of the Alzou, with its dark girdle of walnut trees.

One of the most interesting sights of the place is the Way of the Cross, the various stations of which are at once quaint and artistic. Adjoining the sixth station is a very remarkable Grotto of the Agony, where, beneath the rock which has been blackened by the lapse of centuries, the Saviour is represented on His knees, receiving the cup from the hands of an angel, while the group of sleeping Apostles is stretched upon a heap of stones hard by. The fourteenth station is also located in a grotto, and represents with wonderful art the laying of Christ in His tomb. To understand real religious fervour, this station should be visited on the occasion of one of the great torchlight processions, when some three thousand pilgrims, each holding a lighted taper, throng the entrance to the grotto, and the roar

The Romance of Religion

of their hymns to Mary re-echoes far away among the hills. Finally, above this grotto the pilgrims reach a colossal cross, where their labours are terminated, and they pause to kneel and offer up fresh prayers and vows.

Nowadays there is no difficulty about making the pilgrimage to Roc-Amadour. The railway takes you within two miles of it, and a service of still more prosaic omnibuses brings you to the foot of the hill. But in the Middle Ages its remoteness and the rugged nature of the neighbouring country led to its being considered in the highest degree praiseworthy for penitents to visit. Many people were even sent there as a political punishment. In his treaty of peace with the Flemish in 1304, Philip le Bel reserved the right to punish two thousand of the most guilty persons of the town and territory of Bruges by sending them on a pilgrimage to Roc-Amadour, and similar clauses were inserted in treaties in 1316 and 1326, so terribly difficult was it to reach this place. The

The Black Virgin of Roc-Amadour

roads in the neighbourhood were then so dangerous that numerous military posts were established along them for the protection of pilgrims, as well as inns for their entertainment, and watchfires at night-time upon the adjoining hills, as is the case on the way to Mecca.

CHAPTER XV

THE HERMITS OF THE SIERRA MORENA

MOST of us have by this time a very clear idea of the life of a monk or a nun in any Catholic conventual establishment which may be named. So much has been written on the subject that we may conjure up a fairly accurate picture of their daily round of work and prayer in all its monotonous simplicity. But the mere mention of an hermit still suggests all sorts of mysterious possibilities: men living the lives of outcasts in almost inaccessible caves, prodigies of privation, skulls for cups, rats and serpents for sole companions—in fact, all the romance of

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

religion, as religion was observed in the Middle Ages.

For everything really mediæval and least impaired by the lapse of centuries we must go to Spain, where nothing changes except ministries and a few other details of equal unimportance. So to Spain I went in search of hermits, and was fortunate enough to find a goodly number of them scattered about upon the Sierra Morena, a league or so to the north of Cordoba, the ancient and glorious capital of the Moorish Empire in Spain. If they do not quite come up to the expectations conjured up by the hermits of legend and art, my hermits are, at any rate, deeply interesting in themselves, and afford a vivid picture of the life and ideas of the average hermit three or four hundred years ago.

Hermits, known as "Sons of the Wilderness," have occupied this mountain from beyond the memory of history. The first definite record of them is in the year 1309, when a band of Castilian soldiers deserted the army of Ferdinand IV.

The Romance of Religion

and took to the hermit's life, "resolved," as an old chronicler has it, "to wage war henceforward on behalf of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Though the hermits we are about to consider are so near to Cordoba, they can boast of a full measure of seclusion. To begin with, we may not visit them without a special permit from the bishop, and this is not very readily granted. I have to present myself at his palace punctually at a certain hour and explain, in broken Spanish, to his chaplains the reason of my request—what my motive is, what the result of my visit will be, &c. They are very courteous, but inclined to be a little suspicious. Am I "a North American?"—Heaven forbid!—They smile graciously.—Am I a Catholic?—Of course—though I do not enter into vexed questions of Roman and Anglican, which they would not understand. At last they are satisfied, and I am furnished with a document addressed to "the Chief Brother of the Hermits," and setting forth that "we grant our license to Mr. Herbert Vivian and any other

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

persons who may accompany him to visit the desert and chapel of Our Lady of Belen, provided the established rules are observed. But no permission is given to pass the night in the desert; and this license is only available for three days from the date of issue. — ✠ THE BISHOP OF CORDOBA."

Ladies used not to be allowed in "the desert," and even nowadays they are only accorded permission if accompanied by male relatives. So the solitary, modern, globe-trotting girl is hereby warned off.

Then come difficulties of access. The hermitages are only a league away, but the road is infamous, and the cabmen of Cordoba declare with one consent that the thing can only be done with three horses, and for a payment of seven dollars. However, I have been long enough among Spaniards and Orientals to know how to drive a bargain; and eventually, after waiting almost the full tether of my permit for the weather to clear, I set out with only two horses

The Romance of Religion

and at a conscientious price. But the road proves as impossible as even the cabmen had pictured. Never have I traversed such roads—no, scarcely even in Abyssinia. The result is that I have to walk the greater part of the way. Still, when I come to “the desert” I feel that I have been amply repaid for all my toil and worry.

It is not at all a “desert” as we understand the word. Indeed, the sole thing the place has in common with a desert is its loneliness. We make our way up the slopes of a well-wooded mountain, amid orchards of olives, Moorish rose-gardens, palms, aloes, chestnuts, cacti, and all kinds of tropical plants. Every now and then great tufts of geranium lend a fragrance to the air. Surely “the desert” has fulfilled the Scriptural prophecy and “blossomed as the rose.”

From Cordoba itself, and from the shaky railway by the Guadalquivir, scudding tourists may catch a glimpse of the hermitages — a

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

number of glistening, whitewashed cottages, nestling among the dark woods of the mountain. But the guides will have told them that there is nothing to see beside the view, and they will have grudged an afternoon deducted from their treadmill of churches and galleries. These recluses and their simple lives do not appeal to the slaves of the red-bound guide-books.

Yet I grow excited at the prospect of an interview with a latter-day Simon Stylites, and my spirits rise as the air becomes rarer and more exhilarating, and at last the details of the "Chief Brother's" hermitage are distinctly visible.

Adjoining it are the chapel and refectory. The dwellings of the other hermits are scattered about the hillside at sufficient distances apart to secure the privacy which is the anchorite's ideal. When at last I arrive, I find a simplicity and modesty which exceed all my anticipations. Head-hermitage, chapel, and refectory all together only make up the humblest little whitewashed cottage, with a red-tiled roof and a small

The Romance of Religion

belfry surmounted by a cross. In the rude yard outside over a score of beggars (rarely to be avoided in Spain) are crouching in groups over the coarse but ample fare which the hermits never refuse to any who come to urge their needs.

The distribution of soup to all who care to come for it is one of the sights of the place, and ought not to be missed. Some of the beggars are in a dreadful condition of raggedness and misery. One of them has little more than a rug for all clothing, and it does not suffice to shield his shoulders from the sharp air. The countenances of these beggars wear that expression of mingled wistfulness, gratitude, and dignity which is the characteristic of mendicants all over Spain. The soup is brought out in a large earthenware tureen of mediæval shape, glistening with cleanliness, and tilted out into a bowl, from which it is eaten with three large wooden spoons, which are handed round in turn. A couple of young hermits are surveying the scene with

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

benevolent smiles, which have endeared them throughout the whole countryside.

One of these young hermits comes forward to welcome me, and explains that the rest of the brethren are still in the refectory. In a few minutes, however, they emerge in procession, most of them with their hands raised in an attitude of devotion, as if they were still reciting their grace after meat. Among the group is a young man from Cordoba, who has been privileged to share their frugal fare. In spite of their austerities, the hermits all look the picture of cheerfulness. The Chief Brother has a particularly kind expression, and, after examining the bishop's permit, which I hand to him, he makes me an amiable speech, every word of which he evidently means. He then bids the young hermit show me everything.

First I am taken the round of the various hermitages and told something of the life there. At present there are seventeen hermits and one novice in "the desert." They maintain rigorous

The Romance of Religion

silence, and are completely isolated from each other during the greater part of the day, only meeting for the daily mass and the pious reading which follows it, and for their mid-day meal in the refectory. Breakfast and supper are prepared and eaten by the hermits each alone in his little cell, where he has a simple kind of kitchen. Most of the day and night is spent in meditation and prayer, very little time being accorded for sleep; five hours out of the twenty-four, however, must be devoted to manual labour, generally digging and various forms of gardening. One advantage the hermits have over monks is that they are very little bound by rules, but are free to choose their own times for most of their occupations, the regular hours of prayer alone excepted. The habit is for the Chief Brother, as he goes through his own devotions in the chief hermitage, to sound the bell in his little belfry. Every cell is provided with a belfry and bell of its own, which each hermit must sound when he hears that of the Chief Brother. In this way they



Hermits of the Sierra Morena. Outside a Hermit's Cell.

[To face p. 202.]

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

make sure of observing the hours of prayer simultaneously. To omit to sound his bell is held to be a grave remission of duty, and entails a severe penance.

Let us examine the outside of one of the cells. It is certainly very picturesque with its stately cypresses and great hedges of prickly pear. My guide is standing on the pathway which leads to the mountain, and the owner of the cell is just returning with a pitcher of water which he has been fetching from the well some distance off. Above the little window, which is closed by a thick wooden shutter, we see in a niche the skull of a previous tenant. It wears an expression of deep calm, and seems to smile as it reminds us of the shortness of life. Inside the cell we find little more than bare walls. All its furniture consists of a hard mattress, where the hermit passes his few hours of sleep; a praying-stool with a heavy, antiquated Book of Hours, printed in the sixteenth century; a large, rude crucifix; a couple of pitchers, and the few simple things required

The Romance of Religion

for his simple cookery. I can scarcely restrain my amazement at the cheerfulness which subsists in so terribly depressing a dwelling.

Most of the other cells are identical with this one, and need not be particularly described. That of the Chief Brother is not more luxurious. His hermitage is only larger because it comprises the chapel and refectory under the same roof. In the chapel is a large and somewhat imaginative picture of the "desert" as it appeared in bygone days. Though the perspective is not what it might be, we can see that the hermitages are still much what they were in the Middle Ages. The gardens seem to have improved, but there is the same predilection for cypresses.

Next we come to the house of the novices, which is some distance apart from the other hermitages. When there are several, the novices live together, but as there is only one at present the hermits take it in turn to stay with him and fit him for adopting their mode of life. The novitiate lasts six months, which is found

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

quite sufficient to deter any one who may have no real vocation for the life.

Besides their regular devotions, the hermits repair constantly for prayer to various parts of the "desert" which may be hallowed by sacred associations. For example, the graves of deceased hermits are favourite resorts, but the most popular place is a large, whitewashed pillar, surmounted by a wooden cross. Here, tradition says, a hermit was once upon a time martyred by the Moors. Though the hermits may not speak when they meet in this way, except for reasons of charity or necessity, they doubtless feel it a relief from their solitude to meet other human beings. My guide would not allow this, saying that if that were the object of their coming to the place of prayer it would be a sin which they would have to confess and do penance for.

Confession, by the way, is frequent, but generally quite voluntary. Any hermit may give absolution, but most of the community prefer to

The Romance of Religion

come with their sins to the kindly old Chief Brother, whose sympathy and common sense may always be trusted.

Farther up the hill we come to an elaborate stone seat, or throne, which was made by the hermits for the use of the Bishop of Cordoba, whenever he deigns to visit them. It is often utilised as a confessional, and I have seen a photograph showing one of the hermits in the act of pronouncing absolution. Assuredly no more fitting place could have been chosen for the solemnisation of a holy rite. Here we enjoy, in all its magnificence, the view which the tourists come out for to see. In front of us are the majestic Guadalquivir and the spires of Cordoba, while in the distance are the blue mountains of Cabra and Granada, with the peak of Alcaudete standing forth to the south-east. Among the hills are dainty white pleasure-houses and ruined castles, one of which is pointed out as the summer residence of the Moorish Sovereign, Abdurrahman I. With the world so fair to look



Hermit digging his own grave.

[To face p. 206.]

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

upon, it becomes more incredible than ever that all these men should abandon it voluntarily and remain contented in the seclusion of their lonely "wilderness."

But they certainly seem to deserve the title of "Sons of the Wilderness," by which they have been known to the outer world for so many centuries. They appear to revel in the barest and loneliest corners of their domain, and to find supreme happiness in cherishing the most gloomy and morbid thoughts. Notice the beatific expression of a fine old fellow as he digs his own grave. Like an animal about to die, he has chosen for his last resting-place a spot as far away as possible from the habitations of the living. With a huge pick he has cleared away the brambles and made some progress with his digging. He has paused in his work to say a prayer, and is reflecting upon that blissful state where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. He came to the hermitage in the hope of forgetting all the sadness of his

The Romance of Religion

former life, but he has long ago realised that there can be no complete forgetfulness on this side the grave, and for death accordingly he yearns.

I saw many other strange scenes such as go most largely to make up the life of the "Sons of the Wilderness." In one spot is a fervent hermit, clad in his uniform of a scapulary and cowl of grey cloth, holding a rosary and praying in most absolute solitude before a skull set upon a rock. Presently he heaves a deep sigh of penitential devotion and prostrates himself upon his face before the grisly emblem, clasping his hands in an agony of self-abasement, and remaining motionless for endless minutes amid the deathless silence of Nature. The scene carries us back into the Dark Ages, and I know not which is grimmest—the mocking expression of the skull or the derisive gaiety of the palms and rose-bushes in the background.

"Dies iræ, dies illa
Solvat sæculum in favilla."

The Hermits of the Sierra Morena

A bell tinkles in the distance, and the rapt hermit rises slowly from his knees with a strange, far-away joy lighting up his rugged face. And I return to Cordoba.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARVELS OF MONTSERRAT

MONTSERRAT is the most famous place of pilgrimage in Spain and would undoubtedly eclipse all others in Christendom if it were not that nobody now dreams of going to Spain before exhausting every other tourist resort. For natural beauty this spot has no rival in Europe, unless, perhaps, in Sicily ; in awe-inspiring majesty it surpasses the Alps and the Apennines, while its sanctity and antiquity are unequalled anywhere else in the world.

Geologists ascribe it to no less respectable an age than one million three hundred thousand

The Marvels of Montserrat

years, while theologians dispute whether it took its present shape at the time of the Flood or the Crucifixion. The extraordinary appearance of this *mons serratus* (sawn or serrated mountain), with its fantastic pinnacles and fabulous outline predisposed it to religious associations, so that the ancients ascribed it to Venus, the Moors to the Jinns, and the Church to the Blessed Virgin. Standing out like an enchanted castle, it compels amazement from afar, and on closer acquaintance this is only intensified by the succession of natural wonders which stand revealed.

In old times the journey thither was an arduous and even perilous one, generally undertaken either as a penance or as a meritorious work, to be rewarded with indulgences. Nowadays a variety of roads for walking, riding, and driving, not to mention a rope-railway, render it both easy and agreeable of access to the sixty thousand pilgrims who visit it every year. It is possible to go there in three hours from Barcelona and return the same day for dinner, but

The Romance of Religion

those who desire to make thorough acquaintance with the marvels of the mountain must devote several days to the expedition. They may, however, rely upon finding clean, if simple, accommodation either in the monastery or the adjoining guest-houses, and tolerable fare at the restaurant. The monks observe the hospitable rule of their founder, S. Benedict, and afford free quarters to all comers for three days, or more by special license, accepting only a voluntary contribution to the alms-box. Holy Week is a favourite time for the excursion, as there are many imposing ceremonies and processions at the monastery.

Before we undertake the expedition we shall do well to master the miraculous history of the Virgin of Montserrat, which, even if it be regarded as a mere legend, is in admirable keeping with the impressions produced by this supernatural mountain. The image, whose hand pilgrims are now privileged to kiss in the monastery, is believed, on documentary authority, to have

The Marvels of Montserrat

been carved by S. Luke and brought to Barcelona by S. Peter, when he came to preach in Spain. S. Paciano, Bishop of the city, consecrated a church in its honour, and it remained there until the Moorish invasion, when some pious anchorites secreted it for safety amid the recesses of Montserrat.

In the year 880 some children, who tended sheep upon that mountain, were attracted by a brilliant illumination and melodious strains at one of the caverns on Saturday nights. This naturally aroused much talk, and presently the peasants of the neighbourhood came out to behold the mysterious sight. The priest of the nearest village verified the story and, pronouncing the miracle to be that of the burning bush, set out to summon his bishop, who repaired thither on the following Saturday accompanied by a large concourse of clergy and people. All saw the heavenly flames and heard the holy music, which was sweeter than any ever conceived on earth before. At midnight, with the arrival of Sunday,

The Romance of Religion

the manifestation ceased, and soon after dawn the bishop and his companions made their way, not without difficulty, into the grotto, where they perceived a fragrance so exquisite that it could not be rivalled even if all the perfumes of the universe were gathered together. There, as the old chronicler expresses it, "they discovered a massive image of the Very Pure Virgin Mary, Flower of Flowers, Immaculate Dove, Queen of Angels, our Blessed Lady." And there, many centuries later, a church was built to mark the holy spot.

The bishop ordered the image to be conveyed to his cathedral, and a procession set out with candles and banners. But after the first difficulties of the journey had been overcome and a short rest had been taken, it was found impossible to proceed. All seemed suddenly to have lost every particle of strength; their feet seemed to have taken root in the soil, and the image had suddenly acquired so supernatural a weight that no human effort could move it. The meaning of this

The Marvels of Montserrat

miracle was clear : the Virgin had signified her will that she should be considered the special Patron of this mountain, and that her holy image should remain there. A shrine was accordingly set up at the spot thus designated, and it was not until the end of the sixteenth century that the image was translated, by the Pope's authority, to a church constructed at a more convenient site for its reception.

This is known as the Camarin (Closet or Dressing-room) of the Virgin. Here we may see, besides the image itself, the sumptuous wardrobe, considered a necessary adjunct to all sacred figures in Spain. Some of the mantles are exceptionally beautiful and costly, and would be well worth a visit apart from their associations. The Camarin is paved with admirable mosaics and hung with exquisite tapestries. Big shells are employed for holding holy water. They were sent from the Philippines by some Catalonians residing in those islands. There are side-chapels, one of which is particularly frequented by newly married couples anxious for heirs.

The Romance of Religion

The artistic merits of the image have been much disputed, but I cannot conceive that any one who has been privileged to behold it can deny the imposing majesty of its expression. The only criticism I am disposed to make is that it inspires awe rather than the sympathy and compassion which we are accustomed to associate with our Blessed Lady. Indeed, those who change its vestments on holy days say that it fills them with fear, that they do not dare to look it in the face. In the Virgin's right hand is a globe, from which springs a fleur-de-lys. The crowns worn by her and the infant Christ are of prodigious price, being of pure gold and containing no less than 3,500 precious stones, many of them of exceeding size and purity. Like everything else at Montserrat, they are of modern origin, all the old valuables having been carried off by French troopers in 1811. In front of the image are two little staircases of walnut-wood, by which those who wish to kiss its hand may ascend and descend.

The monastery itself is comparatively modern,

The Marvels of Montserrat

though its record is sufficiently venerable. Like so many other religious and historical monuments in Spain, it suffered wholesale destruction and desecration at the hands of Buonaparte's legions. Not content with the vandalism required for purposes of fortification, these barbarians allowed their soldiers to carry off knapsacks full of chalices and jewels, and they even encouraged the wanton profanation of every holy thing. In true French style, they delighted to desecrate religious relics, which had been venerated for centuries by the faithful; indeed, the very Moors, backed by all the fanaticism of an iconoclastic religion, never wrought such havoc as these self-constituted pioneers of modern civilisation.

On the 11th of October, 1811, they set fire to the monastery, and, as if this were not enough, they returned in the following July to blow up with gunpowder what little had been spared. Now the only remaining vestiges are a Byzantine gateway and a fragment of the Gothic cloisters of the fifteenth century. It is at least some satisfaction

The Romance of Religion

to know that the general, who went out of his way to blow up this marvellous mediæval edifice, suffered a speedy retribution. Another French commander, having told him that his act was a disgrace to the French army, was challenged to a duel, which happily resulted in the death of the devastator.

The restoration of the monastery was only completed some forty years ago, and that on quite a simple scale. We find a great barrack-like edifice, eight storeys high, constructed in a hollow of the fantastic mountain, overlooking a perfect cataract of rocks, and though pious churchmen have been very generous in contributing, it must take many generations before anything approaching the old glories can be revived.

Perhaps the most interesting portion is the chapel of the Immaculate Conception, which occupies the site where Don John of Austria drew his sword and exclaimed, "I swear on this holy altar, and am ready to defend with my life, the verity that the Virgin Mary was conceived without stain of ori-

The Marvels of Montserrat

ginal sin!"—an exquisitely forcible method of argument which would scarcely be understood in this prosaic age.

While we are here we shall do well to visit the musical seminary, which is admirably organised and chiefly recruited from the historical families of Spain. It dates from the year 976, and preserves many customs of extreme antiquity. On the 6th of December of every year, being the feast of S. Nicholas, their patron, the boys (whose ages range from eight to ten) meet in solemn conclave and elect one of their number to bear the title of Bishop for the next twelve months. He is generally chosen from among the wealthiest and most aristocratic of their number. He then proceeds to appoint a Vicar-General, Secretary and Coadjutors, who must obey his behests and may share his privileges. Among the most valued of these is exemption from all punishments and from attendance at early mass during the octave of S. Nicholas. Another is that the Bishop is allowed to have his breakfast in bed during that

The Romance of Religion

period. His lordship, clad in a mantle of episcopal violet and a green hat, proceeds with his retinue to ask leave of the Abbot for the whole seminary to visit the monks in their cells. This is always granted, and the monks have a stock of presents in readiness for them. Then the heyday winds up with a picnic, which the little Bishop is expected to provide.

The origin of the monastery is shrouded in a picturesque, if not very edifying legend. Once upon a time, or, to be more precise, some thousand years ago, there lived in a cave of Montserrat an anchorite named John Garin, who was so holy that, wherever he went, even in Rome, all church bells pealed spontaneously as he passed. Any one who doubts this may still see in the present monastery a bell, which is known as that of the miracle. It now strikes the quarters for the big clock, but in Garin's day it was hung outside his cave, and always rang of its own accord at his approach. Before its removal to the monastery, it was to be seen over the Chapel of San Acisclo,

The Marvels of Montserrat

which dates back to the sixth century. So great was the reputation of Garin's sanctity that when Riquildis, the beautiful daughter of Count Wilfrid the Hairy, became possessed of evil spirits, the obvious course was to take her to Garin that he might cast them out. The Count came with Riquildis and a great cavalcade to the cave, where they espied Garin clothed in sackcloth and wearing a beard of prodigious length and thickness. He readily agreed to pray for the unhappy girl, and he had hardly risen from his knees when a loud rumbling was heard re-echoing through the mountain, and Riquildis recovered her senses.

Her father then requested the saint to allow her to remain with him for an octave, that his holy teaching might prevent all possibility of the evil spirits' return. Garin made every conceivable objection, but the Count insisted with menaces and departed, leaving her alone with the hermit. After several days, which were spent in pious conversations and prayers, a terrible tempest broke upon

The Romance of Religion

the mountain, evidently provoked in revenge by the evil spirits which had been cast out. They even triumphed over the sanctity of the hermit, who cut off the girl's head, buried her, and fled frantically out into the darkness.

When the storm was at an end, he was overwhelmed with remorse, and hurried off to Rome to confess his crimes to the Pope. Wherever he went he noticed that church bells no longer rang out their welcome as he passed. The Pope absolved him, but ordered, as a penance, that he should return to Montserrat on all fours, and remain in that position until a child of a few months should announce to him the pardon of God.

The long, painful journey was at last accomplished, and he crawled about the mountain during seven years, living on roots, and becoming so entirely covered with hairs that he was indistinguishable from a wild beast. At last, one day, Count Wilfrid found him while hunting on the mountain. The hounds were alarmed by the sight of this

The Marvels of Montserrat

strange creature, but the Count ordered it to be taken alive and brought with a rope round its neck to his stables at Barcelona.

Not long after, there were great festivities in honour of the Count's infant son, then three months old, and the beast, having acquired a great reputation for tameness, was dragged into the house to divert the guests. Then, to every one's amazement, while bones were being thrown to the strange animal, the child, which had never yet spoken, suddenly exclaimed, "Arise, John Garin, God hath forgiven thee thy sins." The hermit at once stood up and gave thanks to Heaven, whereupon the Count, not unnaturally, asked for news of his long-lost daughter.

Garin confessed all and begged to be put to death, but the Count said that as God had forgiven him he must do so too. So they set out for Montserrat, intending to find the remains of Riquildis and give them Christian burial. By this time they were not easy to surprise, but none of them could fail to be astounded when, after digging carefully at the spot

The Romance of Religion

indicated by the hermit, they found that she was still alive and well. The only trace of her experiences was a thin red line, like a silk thread, upon her milk-white neck at the place where her head had been cut off.

She announced that she was determined to devote the rest of her life to religion, and the Count accordingly founded a Benedictine Convent, of which she became Superior, as well as the present monastery, which Garin would only consent to join as a lay brother. The nunnery was removed from Montserrat in the year 976, when the Moors were ravaging Catalonia, but the monastery remained and was converted into an abbey by the Spanish Pope Benedict XIII. in 1410. Just before reaching the monastery we come upon a great tank, which has been adorned by colossal figures of the Apostles. These were the work of a common soldier, who joined the Brotherhood two centuries ago.

At the present day, the visitor to Montserrat will be most interested, after the great natural beauties

The Marvels of Montserrat

of the place, by the hermitages and caves. The hermitages are no longer what they were, probably because hermits have long ago ceased to inhabit them. The last, and that after a great interval, was a sailor, named Espinosa, who came thither in 1855, having made a vow to do so while in peril of his life at sea ; but he has since disappeared, perhaps tired of the solitary existence, though that is not certainly known. The fourteen hermitages are in a pitiable state of decay, and the neglect of the pathways, which the hermits used to keep up, has made them very arduous of access. There were hermits on Montserrat in the early days of Christianity, but their regular institution does not date further back than the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. After this they dressed in grey-hooded cloaks, shaved their heads and let their beards grow. They did not take orders, but after passing a year's novitiate at the monastery made a vow never to leave the mountain. Each lived in a separate hermitage and was bound to show sign of life by ringing his bell every morning at two o'clock.

The Romance of Religion

The first hermitage was known as Thebes, in order to recall the solitudes of Egypt, where the earliest hermits abode. It is reached by a flight of six hundred steps cut into the live rock. The summit of the hill, where the last hermitage is situated, was called Tabor after the site of the Transfiguration. To arrive thither it is necessary to pass through an extraordinary gorge between stupendous rocks—a slit so narrow that it is only possible to pass through in single file. This place, for some unknown reason, has been dubbed the Strait of Gibraltar.

The whole expedition affords an unending succession of surprises, and time would fail to chronicle more than a few of the most striking features. Near the Hermitage of S. Jerome is a strange rock, which bears an impressive likeness to a gigantic skull. Another rock, near the Hermitage of S. Anthony, is known as the Jays' Nest, from the countless congregations of those birds which always frequent it. Passing along the sides of terrific precipices, we behold a series of the most entrancing



Montserrat. Panorama from the Hermitages.

[To face p. 226.]

The Marvels of Montserrat

panoramas, stretching on one side to the Pyrenees and on the other as far as the Balearic Islands, and presently we come to the Well of San Salvador, which is reputed to be bottomless.

Perhaps the imagination will be most vividly seized by a marvellous natural stronghold, near the Hermitage of San Dimas (the Good Thief). It consists of a huge rugged rock, almost entirely surrounded by yawning chasms, thousands of feet in depth, which afforded the most stupendous natural moat ever conceived by the mind of man. It is small wonder that successions of robber bands took advantage of this golden opportunity and built their castles there during the Dark Ages.

At the time of the French invasion the monks secreted there most of their plate and jewels as well as the miraculous image of the Virgin, which they considered the most priceless possession of all. For additional safety, they set up a copy of the image in the monastery. This the French desecrated and destroyed with barbarous contumely, but, having made their way to the hiding-place in this

The Romance of Religion

rock and laid hands upon the treasury, they contented themselves with casting out upon the mountain what they flattered themselves was merely a copy of the holy image. It suffered somewhat from the elements, of course, but the monks were able to rescue it and preserve it to this day.

I have kept the caves, which are beyond doubt the most interesting part of all this marvellous mountain, to the last. One of the many curious things about them is that, after having been greatly admired and frequented in ancient times and right through the Middle Ages, they were completely lost sight of. Quite within recent times an Englishman who had visited Montserrat, chanced upon an engraving of last century, which depicted the wonders of these caves. Assisted by a friend from Barcelona he set out in search of them, and soon rediscovered, in 1851, what amounts almost to a subterranean city. The exploration of it now requires several days to do justice to so engrossing an attraction, and a certain number of guides, provided with torches

The Marvels of Montserrat

and Bengal lights, is indispensable. The true enthusiast will be amply rewarded if he so arranges his time-table as to arrive there in the small hours of the morning.

On entering the first grotto, you seem to be under imminent menace of burial beneath the overhanging boulders. The Sword of Damocles were a pleasing companion in comparison. As soon as your eyes grow accustomed to the twilight of this lower world you realise that you are in an immense hall, adorned with colossal arches of live rock. You proceed to climb and slide and scramble along the edges of bottomless pits until, towards noon, you come to a broad chamber where gleams of sunlight force their way in, lighting up vaults of wild magnificence, enormous columns sculptured by the action of water, if not by the Jinns. You might roam for days through this Kingdom of the Gnomes and always find something new, for the variety of natural architecture and kaleidoscopic scenery is endless.

Perhaps the most interesting place for the student of history is a cave where a number of women and

The Romance of Religion

children were concealed in 1811, when the French were in the habit of putting whole villages to the sword. The refugees had climbed down by means of rope-ladders and, after the lapse of several days, had begun to rejoice in their security, when suddenly a band of troopers appeared with torches in their midst. Even then nothing might have been discovered, had not one of the women allowed a slight cry to escape her. Then the French officer in command was about to give the word to fire, when a blacksmith, who was in charge of the fugitives, called out that a single shot would bring down the whole mountain about their ears. The French hesitated to believe this, whereupon the man threw a tin pan down a precipice, and it made so alarming a noise that the invaders judged it better to retire, and no further intrusion was attempted.

Soon after this place, we come to a wonderful likeness of the choir of a cathedral, with jagged stones shaped like carved stalls, columns of amazing regularity, Gothic arches, and even a niche which seems only to await the erection of an image.

The Marvels of Montserrat

Then comes the "Boudoir of the Sylphs," to reach which we must crawl on all fours through a painfully narrow inlet. The boudoir is marvellously furnished by nature and contains, in addition to much exquisite mural decoration, a miniature theatre and the semblance of all sorts of fruits.

The Devil's Well requires almost an acrobatic training to enter, and is only less extraordinary than the stalactite grotto to which it gives access. Lighted up with Bengal fires, this is like a glimpse of fairyland. Further still, we find the Grotto of the Elephant—a stone creature surmounted by turrets such as are familiar to us in ancient Persian warfare.

Volumes might be written about the unending wonders of this region, but I will only refer to the Gallery of Ghosts, where white, spectral figures are ranged along the walls; the Saloon of Columns, where natural arabesques are formed by stalactites above archways worthy of the Alhambra; and the Grotto of the Bats, where thousands of nocturnal creatures have made their home and

The Romance of Religion

scare away all who have not the strongest nerves.

Apart from the hard climbing through the darkness, the caves are also to be dreaded for their quick changes of temperature, varying as much as 18° Fahrenheit within the space of a few yards.

But in spite of every obstacle and hardship, I am convinced that there is no place on earth so deserving in every way of pilgrimage as Montserrat.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FANCY DRESS PILGRIMAGE OF WALCOURT

THE *marches militaires* of the Sambre et Meuse country date from very early times. The legend is that S. Materna himself carved the black image of the Virgin, which is the pride of Walcourt. The church where it lived was burnt in the year 1304, but the image was carried by the hands of angels into the valley of Walcourt, where Count Thierry of Rochefort found it and restored the church. It is in memory of this miracle, which saved the image, that every year on Trinity Sunday a grand procession with military music and paraphernalia takes place at Walcourt, and the scene of the miracle is re-enacted with fancy dresses to repre-

The Romance of Religion

sent the personages concerned in it. The number of pilgrims is enormous. All the villages in the neighbourhood send contingents. We are here in the Waterloo country, the cockpit of Europe, and all sorts of ancient uniforms have been treasured up to be worn at the pilgrimage.

The peasants set out on foot for Walcourt in the small hours of the morning and I followed them by a six o'clock train from a neighbouring townlet, accommodation at Walcourt itself being out of the question. The pilgrims were mostly peasants, and some of them were very rough-looking characters, quite of the Hooligan type, so my sister and I kept a tight hold upon our purses and chains. As the crowds poured out of the train, howls and groans greeted us from every kind of halt, maimed, and blind. I have never beheld such a dreadful collection of afflicted persons. They thrust their withered arms into our faces and tried to crawl under our feet. I heard one man say, as he caught sight of my camera, "I am willing to allow anything, even to be photographed, for the sake of my poor wretched



*Fancy Dress Pilgrimage of Walcourt.
One of the principal citizens masquerades as Count Thierry of Rochefort.*

[To face p. 234.]

Fancy Dress Pilgrimage of Walcourt

family." Although it was only seven o'clock, dancing was already going on in the restaurants of the long street leading to the village, and beer-drinking had begun. Crowds of stalls lined the way and the walls were covered with so many pictures of saints that we might have been in an open-air gallery. Most conspicuous in the stalls were numbers of china images of the Black Virgin in her white robes.

The whole of the village was crowded with people of every sort, and even at Bordeaux Fair I have never seen a greater variety of booths and gipsy vans. Suspicious-looking people were wandering about, and every kind of snare was laid out to take in the gaping rustic. There were horrible boa-constrictors threatening to coil themselves round terrified little boys, and the church was surrounded by showmen, whose strident voices never ceased for an instant until the procession actually emerged.

This procession was not due until noon, but already bands of burlesque soldiers pranced

The Romance of Religion

about, showing off and practising their complex manœuvres. The heat was terrific. Outside the village, at a wayside shrine, I saw a little child kneeling in prayer. Unfortunately she perceived me taking a snapshot of her, whereupon she burst into tears, and was not to be soothed even by an offering of sous. We went and sat inside the church to escape the sun and dust, but the odour of hot peasant was so unpleasant that we could not remain long. However, we beheld the Black Virgin on a high pedestal, gorgeously dressed in white. Beside her stood two little boys, who were very busy rubbing against the dress of the image various objects, which were being handed up to them incessantly by the crowd. I saw people giving up their hats, baskets, walking-sticks, and even umbrellas to receive this blessing. Just outside the church door sat a patient group waiting for the procession, many of them evidently fatigued by their long walk through the night.

We were somewhat puzzled as to the best

Fancy Dress Pilgrimage of Walcourt

means of witnessing the procession, for the prospect of being hustled in the narrow streets was not an attractive one. It was not a moment for giving way to shyness, so I walked boldly up to the Mairie and asked for the chief magistrate. A very polite man was pointed out to me, and, when I had told him that I was an English traveller who desired to write an account of the procession, he placed himself at my service. He could not understand why any one should take an interest in Walcourt, but he was delighted that we should do so, and he recommended us to go to a little pot-house over the way and mention his name to the landlady, a very obliging and respectable woman. This plan turned out admirable, for we were accommodated in a clean, cool room upstairs, where we could see everything in comfort.

A bodyguard proceeded to fetch the image from the cathedral. They wore huge busbies, surmounted by great pompons of white feathers, fully two feet high. Their chief carried a mace under his arm, and they all wore an extra-

The Romance of Religion

ordinary kind of pinafore or overall, trimmed with rows of gold braid and bunches of pink ribbons.

At last the real procession began. It was preceded by heralds wearing similar pinafores. They advanced at a snail's pace, pirouetting and walking backwards to clear the way. Every now and then they executed a peculiar little goose-step, which seems to be an essential part of the ceremony. Owing to the great heat, the military escort of the image frequently removed their busbies and carried them on the top of their bayonets. Perhaps the most important figure in the procession, besides the image itself, was the man dressed up to represent Count Thierry of Rochefort, who rescued the image in 1304. This part was taken by one of the principal citizens, riding a white horse and wearing a visor and magnificent mantle. The image of the Virgin was borne along on a sort of trestle underneath a great crown. As it arrived the confusion became wilder and wilder. The crowds made a wild dash

Fancy Dress Pilgrimage of Walcourt

forward, and many of them succeeded in squeezing themselves underneath the image between its supporters. I could see thirty or forty of them huddled close together and being dragged along in the most uncomfortable manner, but radiantly happy at being close to the miraculous image. An enormous mob followed, and the whole procession made its way by a long circuit round the mountain of Walcourt to the scene of the miracle, where the whole story of the finding of the image was re-enacted. There a tree was solemnly planted, and this had scarcely been done when it was stripped of all its leaves and branches in a very few minutes by the pious pilgrims, who coveted them as relics.

A similar military *Marche* takes place at the neighbouring village of Gerpennes, where military costumes accompany a religious procession. Besides this fancy dress element, the chief characteristic of these ceremonies consists in the enormous amount of noise which accompanies them. The origin of it all may be ascribed

The Romance of Religion

to the troublesome periods, when it was necessary to protect a procession or other religious demonstration against the robbers who infested the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT OF THE REDEEMER AT VENICE

THE art of keeping high festival is one of the few traditions of old times which have made an attempt at survival in Venice to-day. The money and the enterprise which lent magnificence to the *fêtes* of the old Venetian Republic are now no longer available, but the city is so ideally fitted by nature for pageantry that even the worst attempts and the worst will in the world cannot prevent the thing from being well done. The winding sweep of the Grand Canal, with its mediæval palaces, upon which a few carpets and yards of bunting confer an air of joyous beauty; the Basin of S. Mark, with its

The Romance of Religion

scenic effects of churches, bell-towers, and domes ; the incomparable Piazza, which a few Chinese lanterns and Bengal lights at once turn into a fairy hall worthy of the "Arabian Nights"—these are the raw material for festal displays such as no other city in the world can rival. The results are seen to the best advantage on the night of the 18th of July, that of the Festival of the Redeemer (Redentore), chief of all the festivals at Venice, when practically the whole population spends the night upon the water.

A day or two beforehand a pontoon bridge is made across the Grand Canal at the principal ferry, midway between the Piazzetta and the Iron Bridge. On three occasions only in the year is the bridge erected : on the Festival of the Salute, when the whole population goes over to give thanks to Mary the Mother of Health, who stayed the plague on the 21st of November, 1631 ; on the day of S. Anthony, and on this Festival of the Redentore. From the smallest hours in the morning until late at night there

Night of the Redeemer at Venice

is a constant stream of people passing to and fro across this bridge, and the gondoliers of the ferry, whose occupation has been destroyed thereby, receive three lire apiece to make up for the work they lose. In any case, however, they would have small ground for complaint, as the Festival of the Redentore is far and away their best opportunity of laying by a nest-egg for the winter, when there are no foreigners to fleece, and when they are glad to sell their services for as little as two or three lire the day. To the gondolier of Venice Redentore Day is as important an event as Derby Day to the gondolier of London.

The gondolier's patrons on this day are chiefly natives, and those who cannot afford a whole gondola to themselves club together with their friends or make one of a party in a big *barca*, which will hold from twenty to thirty people tightly packed, at two lire or so a head. At the ordinary Venetian Festival the foreigner is chiefly in evidence. His gold secures him the chief place

The Romance of Religion

at regattas and the best boats at serenades, but as a rule he draws the line at spending the whole night in song and carouse upon the waters. If, however, he starts out with the idea of seeing the fun for an hour or two, and then returning leisurely to bed at his hotel, he runs the risks, first, of seeing only the tamer part of the entertainment, and, secondly, of finding himself so far wedged into the crowd of boats and barges that it is hopeless to attempt escape. But for its inordinate length he might, however, find the festival very bright and beautiful. Every boat is decorated with coloured cloths and coloured lanterns ; it is provisioned with meat and (especially) drink to last through the night ; and it is traditionally the bounden duty of every one present to contribute to the gaiety of the proceedings by unceasing mirth and song. By sunset the whole Basin of S. Mark is a dense surging mass of boats, the greater part of whose occupants are fortifying themselves for the night's dissipation by taking their first supper. When

Night of the Redeemer at Venice

the short twilight is over, a large barge makes its appearance, containing the municipal band. Very slowly it proceeds round the Basin, and the other boats, lighting their infinite variety of paper lanterns, form themselves into a dense, unwieldy procession, each vying with the other to follow the musicians as closely as possible. When the circuit has been made once or twice and the darkness of night has stolen over the scene, the fireworks begin. No doubt they are very ordinary fireworks—everything in modern Italy is ordinary—but amid these fairy surroundings they are transfigured seemingly into the most wonderful fireworks in the world, and reveal beauties unsuspected even in this enchanted city of surprises. If it rain, the fireworks are adjourned to another night, but the crowd of boats, fortified with umbrellas and thick cloaks, like those of a melodramatic villain, is no less dense and no less enthusiastic. Attendance at the Redentore Festival has about it something of a religious, or, at any rate, of a superstitious duty, which

The Romance of Religion

risers above any mere considerations of comfort or convenience.

All night long the crowd is gradually melting away in the direction of the Lido—that long, narrow island to which Venice owes her lagoons, and her protection from the Adriatic. In the coffee-room of the bathing establishment a music-hall entertainment goes on, with frequent and lengthy *entr'actes*, from midnight until dawn. Suppers and beverages of every description are served both in the densely packed hall and outside on the adjoining platform which overlooks the sea. All along the sands by the seashore the common people are holding high revelry. Rustic bands are playing rickety accompaniments at intervals to ardent dancers in the sombre dress of the district. Others have brought provisions, and are picnicking in parties of two or more upon the sands and short, sunburnt grass. Others are paddling or even bathing in the water, regardless of municipal regulations to the contrary. On all hands there is a manifest determination, from which effort is not altogether

Night of the Redeemer at Venice

absent, that at all costs the jollification shall be kept up, the high spirits shall not flag, and nobody shall go home till morning. By three o'clock there is scarcely a belated gondola left upon the lagoons. All those who have been beguiling the hours of the short night upon the water have made their way to the Lido, and the rest of Venice, which has preferred to make merry in the Piazza or at Dreher's Music Hall or in the various coffee-houses, has gone across in the special steamers, frantically overcrowded, which, on this night of all nights in the year, ply to and fro at frequent intervals.

When the first glimmer of the false dawn has made its appearance upon the horizon the whole hall at the Lido rapidly empties itself on to the wooden platform in front, heedless of the remaining verses which the sleepy singer has yet to deliver. We have come here, like old-world pagans, to pay our respects to the rising sun, and not if we know it shall Apollo lift his head and fail to find us watching. The interval seems

The Romance of Religion

endless, and we are for ever consulting the watches which we have forgotten to wind, half wondering to ourselves whether by any chance he will be late or whether the exact hour at which he is due (how we know it by heart!) is not a mere invention of the almanac-makers. People jostle one another at the edge of the terrace, standing on their chairs—on the tables even—and craning their necks some half-hour too early to catch the first glimmer of the sun's surface. Small children and others who may have failed to resist the beguilements of sleep are vigorously aroused by their friends, and hustled out to join the expectant throng; the very cooks and waiters in their shirt-sleeves hurry forth to gaze upon the spectacle, as if it were not one which they might behold for the asking any fine day of their lives. There are several false alarms. Some one cries "A-a-a-a-a-h!" when there was nothing to be seen, and every one cranes his neck more eagerly to attention. Gradually it becomes a kind of stand-

Night of the Redeemer at Venice

ing joke to cry "A-a-a-a-a-h!" and fool everybody else. Meanwhile there has been a great rush upon the bathing-sheds, and several hundreds of people in bathing costume await the dawn in the side galleries. A motherly municipality ordains that none shall enter the water there before sunrise, so they must wait with what patience they can command until the happening of that great event which all are assembled to behold.

At last the "A-a-a-a-a-h's!" become simultaneous, enthusiastic, and unmistakable. The edge of the great golden ball has been detected upon the horizon and is gradually—rapidly even—forcing its way up. The bathers are skipping out to sea with demon-like antics through the shallow water of a very low tide. The weary watchers give an unmistakable sigh of relief, and there is much arranging of cloaks and wraps for departure now that the performance is at an end. The worst of it is that everybody wants to go home at the same time, and as the boats and

The Romance of Religion

steamers only contain accommodation for a twentieth part of the crowd, you are compelled either to pay a mad sum for your conveyance or to wait about impatiently for an unconscionable time. When at last you reach the Piazza you bless the immemorial custom, according to which the coffee-houses there remain open all day and all night from year's end to year's end, and your morning cup of coffee acquires a new relish from the novelty of the experiences.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HOLY HOUSE OF S. IGNATIUS

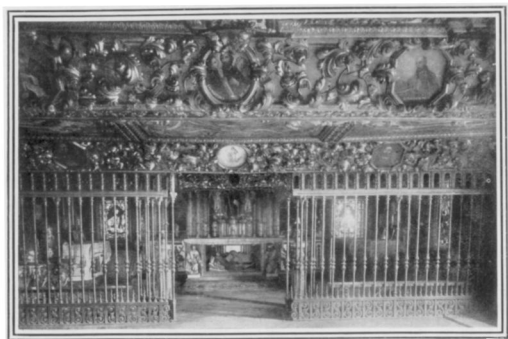
IN the north of the Basque Provinces, far away from cities and railways, nestling in the green valley of the Urola, lies the marvel of Guipuzcoa, the sanctuary which for over two hundred years has been the heart of the Society of Jesus. Here, in 1689, Maria Anna of Austria, the widow of Philip IX. of Spain, laid the foundation-stone of the immense edifice which was to shield and protect the Santa Casa de Loyola, the holy house, where the famous founder of the Jesuits was born.

If you wish to see Loyola in all its glory you should visit it on the 31st of July, the day of

The Romance of Religion

S. Ignatius. The whole place is like a great fair, and visitors come from all parts of the world to reverence the famous shrine. Loyola is some way off the tourist's track. You must take the train from San Sebastian to the little village of Zarauz, and drive thence for eighteen miles along a beautiful but hilly road beneath the wooded mountains. Shortly before your arrival you will pass the quaint little Basque town of Azpeitia, a bustling place, with the typical Basque houses, covered with white plaster and rows of balconies, not unlike Swiss chalets. Here in the summer an army of shoemakers seem constantly at work in the street; in fact, the whole town might be populated only by a guild of shoemakers. Outside every door, their materials piled beside them, you see them all working as feverishly at the rough old Basque shoes of sheepskin with their strange Roman pattern as though the whole of the universe must be provided with foot-gear within a given time.

However, no one stay here. We must drive



Room in the House of S. Ignatius.

[To face p. 252.]

The Holy House of S. Ignatius

straight on to the inn at Loyola, an immense building, where everything recalls the fact that this is a very Mecca to every admirer of the Jesuits. In fact, the inn seems to shine with a kind of reflected sanctity from the Santa Casa. All over the walls are notices forbidding swearing and blasphemy, and there is a great array of statues of the saints. The inn itself is of great antiquity and possesses stately halls and imposing corridors. The bedrooms are large and lofty, very white from constant coats of whitewash, and on the walls are more statues of saints and stoups of holy water. All night long you hear the bells of the monastery, as though services were going on eternally.

The hotel stands close to the monastery, a wonderfully imposing mass, which lies on one of the tiniest sites that could possibly have been chosen. It is in a marvellously fertile plain, the only one to be found for miles around in this hilly country. It is watered by a mountain stream, walled in and shut off from the outer

The Romance of Religion

world by precipitous mountains on almost every side. On your way to the sanctuary you are besieged by eager crowds, who insist on selling you photographs, medals, and other souvenirs. In front of the monastery are rows of quince trees and bright beds of flowers. Nothing is shut in. There are no fences and no gates. The holy house and birthplace of S. Ignatius, the ancestral manor of his race, is enclosed in this vast edifice. It is a strange, high, red-bricked tower, a typical feudal castle of the district, recalling a petrified haystack. There are three stories, on the third of which is the chamber of the saint, now turned into a chapel, a low room hung with rich red brocade, and filled with every kind of ornament and relic. Among these relics is a finger of S. Ignatius, sent hither from Rome. It is kept in a reliquary at the breast of the statue of the saint. There is also the chalice with which S. Francis Borgia celebrated his first mass. Though related to the bad Borgias, he was a very holy man—the friend and first con-

The Holy House of S. Ignatius

vert of S. Ignatius, and one of the most austere of his disciples. Nearly every room in the holy house is now a chapel, where lamps burn day and night, and the Jesuits have now for generations taken a special pride in contributing to their enrichment.

The entrance to the sanctuary is very imposing. There are long rows of marble steps with balustrades, marble lions, and a beautiful statue in the centre. The façade is magnificent, and the great dome gives the place a look of dignity and importance. The left wing of the building has never been properly finished, as while the Jesuits were engaged upon it they were suddenly expelled from Spain by Charles III.

The big Jesuit college is in the right wing, and has a very fine staircase, bordered on each side by statues and sacred pictures.

Jesuit fathers are proverbially charming, and greet us with cheerful, smiling faces. They seem delighted to welcome visitors, and show them over with the greatest affability. The monastery

The Romance of Religion

is a veritable labyrinth, so huge that novices often lose themselves. There are immense bare white passages and corridors, which the eye can scarcely penetrate. Little cells border them on each side, and over each door is written the name of the father who occupies it. You realise how widespread is the Jesuit Order when you read familiar English names dotted about among strange ones from Russia, Poland, and almost every corner of the civilised world.

There is also a college for small boys, who seem to have no dread of the terrible fathers. On the contrary, you hear their shrill, small voices chattering and laughing, and the morose walls seem to have no depressing influence upon them.

On the 31st of July the feast day of S. Ignatius is observed, and crowds of visitors and pilgrims come to Loyola from every part of the world. A few years ago, when a new General of the Society of Jesus had to be elected, there was an enormous gathering of Jesuits here, and the

The Holy House of S. Ignatius

sight must have been a peculiarly impressive one. The General is often known as the Black Pope, and is really a far more important person than the Bishop of Rome, wielding far greater power and inspiring far greater fear. He is chosen for life, and is supreme over the members of the Society. By his sole, unquestioned authority he can nominate every officer and remove him at will. To him belongs the sole control of the vast funds of the Society. Every Jesuit is at his orders, and he can impose on them any task he chooses without fear of murmur. They must abandon to him every inclination of their will and listen to his injunctions as though he were Christ Himself. They are merely passive instruments, like potter's clay in his hands. It is to this singular quality that the Society owes its individuality and irresistible force. Nowhere in the annals of mankind will you find such perfect despotism, exercised not only over monks themselves, but over wise and prudent men dispersed throughout all quarters of the globe. The

The Romance of Religion

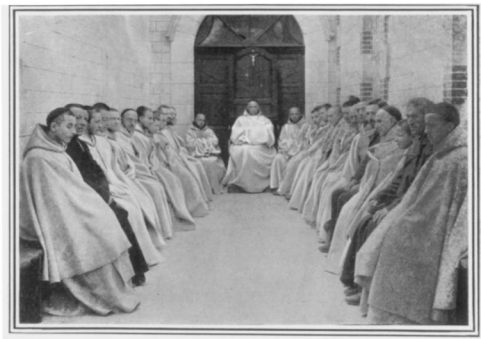
General must be perfectly informed with respect to the characters and abilities of his subordinates. Thus every novice who desires to join the Society is obliged to confess his defects and to disclose his inclinations, bent of mind, likes, dislikes, and all manner of emotions. This he must repeat every six months. Each member must observe his colleagues and report upon them to his Superior. They remain novices until their characters have been completely scrutinised, and they cannot attain to full membership until they reach the age of thirty-three. The Superiors in various parts of the world submit frequent reports concerning their subordinates to the General. These reports are carefully entered in registers, so that if the General desires to send an instrument to some particular place he has only to consult his register to find out the person best suited for his purpose. The education of youth is the special province, and one of the most important secrets of the enormous influence of the Jesuits. They are preachers and missionaries, and generally con-

ERRATA.

The illustration facing page 258 is of Trappist, not Jesuit, novices, as might be supposed from the location of this illustration.

Page viii of Preface, "other" should read as "one."

On the back of the title the sub-title of Abyssinia should be "From the Lion Land to the Court of the Lion of Judah," and not as given.



The Novices.

[To face p. 253.]

The Holy House of S. Ignatius

trive to become confessors to all Roman Catholic monarchs or persons of rank. They are almost the only people who have ever made missions to the heathen a real success, and the rapidity with which they have spread the useful side of civilisation is little short of miraculous. One may disapprove of missions in general, but it is impossible for any fair-minded person to deprecate those of the Jesuits. Having been trained to absolute self-sacrifice, utter disregard of danger and carelessness of comfort, resigning themselves to be mere pawns in the hands of an expert chess-player, they have proved quite irresistible. They have also been encouraged to develop agriculture, manufactures, and trade wherever they go, and their peculiar abilities have enabled them to amass enormous fortunes, not for their own benefit but for the strengthening of their Society. When we take all this into consideration, it is not to be wondered at that they should have inspired vehement jealousy and hatred among their unsuccessful rivals. The popular

The Romance of Religion

imagination has also been inflamed against them by the mysterious secrecy of their actions. They never advertise. They appear in no processions. If they come before the public, the fact of their being Jesuits is kept in the background. All their work is done behind the scenes with the utmost perfection and precision. They never act before they can make certain of success. The vast fortunes at their disposal and the relentless character of their discipline give them an enormous advantage. Mighty Governments and headless democracies have trembled equally before them. Panic has prompted persecution again and again, but the Jesuits have merely dived down beneath the waves of it and come up serenely on the other side.

How interesting, therefore, must it be to repair to the cradle of this unique and marvellous organisation and breathe the atmosphere which fostered the supreme genius of Loyola. A volume would be required to do justice to the life and character of the saint. In these pages

The Holy House of S. Ignatius

I can only hope to have indicated a few striking outlines, which may inspire my readers to study the various authorities—Gonzalez, Ribadeneira, Polanco, and the Exercises—for themselves, to reconstitute in their minds the transcendent being who, for good or for evil, has perhaps most widely influenced the modern world. At the same time they will learn to appreciate the methods and the devotion to which his stupendous engine owed its exuberant force, and—who knows?—they may find lessons, if only of patience or abnegation, for the advancement and defence of the Anglo-Catholic Church.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOLY COAT

THE old Prince Bishopric of Treves usually remains in a half-slumbering condition, undisturbed save by a few inquisitive tourists, who wander thither from the beaten track. At long intervals, however, vast crowds of pilgrims come thither to do reverence to the Holy Coat, which is, perhaps, one of the most jealously guarded relics in the possession of the Roman Catholic Church.

Some ten years ago an exhibition of the Holy Coat was held at Treves. Before that there had not been one since 1844, when a million pilgrims

The Holy Coat

and strangers flocked to the cathedral from all parts of the world. Every sort of miracle has been placed on record. On touching the hem of the garment the sick became healed, the lame walked, the deaf heard, and the sight of the blind was restored.

There are very many other important relics in the Cathedral of Treves, including a nail of the cross, part of the cross itself, and other memorials of Christ's life, but none are held in such deep veneration as the Holy Coat, which is certainly the most important of all the Christian relics which have been preserved. Three times last century the Coat has been displayed over the high altar for the veneration of the Faithful, and the vast throngs which have been attracted thither can rarely have been surpassed in the history of Christian enthusiasm.

One reason for the special veneration accorded to this coat is the fact that it is the only relic mentioned in the Gospels as having possessed the power of working miracles. It will be remembered how those who touched it in the throng were immediately healed. The dress in Palestine at the time of our

The Romance of Religion

Lord consisted of a narrow garment reaching to the feet and having short, wide sleeves. This is the costume which Christ must always have worn when teaching the people. At the time of the Crucifixion, the soldiers divided his clothes and drew lots for the Coat. It is of brownish-coloured linen and without seam. The soldier who obtained possession of it must have disposed of it to some faithful disciple, and it is on record that the first Christians treasured Our Lord's belongings as precious memorials of his life on earth.

Nothing definite is known about the Coat between the time of the Crucifixion and that of the Empress Helena. The true Cross was found by her in the year 327, from information accorded to her in a dream. She and her son Constantine had become Christians after seeing the sign of the cross in the sky, and her discovery of the Cross was followed by that of many other precious relics, with which churches at Rome and Constantinople were enriched. She is said to have been born at Treves and to have turned her palace there into a church,

The Holy Coat

and she presented the town with our Lord's seamless coat and one of the knives used at the Last Supper.

After this, the history of the coat remained for a long time in obscurity. A writer in 870 mentions that S. Helena had sent a chest of very holy relics to her native town of Treves. In the eleventh century the presence of the Coat there was mentioned, and it was stated that no one had dared to open the casket containing it, all being overcome with fear. It was not until the year 1196 that the Holy Coat was placed over the high altar of the cathedral, and it was not exposed to the public gaze for some three hundred years. At the time of the French Revolution, when the barbarous soldiers of the Republic overran Europe, desecrating churches and relics, the Holy Coat was rescued by Graf von Kesselstadt, and taken first to Ehrenbreitstein, then Wurzburg, Bamberg, and finally Augsburg for security, only to be brought back when the storm was overpast. A very long list of miracles

The Romance of Religion

has been recorded during the last century, and those who have not been cured by the Holy Coat do not lose faith, but depart vowing that the ways of God are inscrutable.

Such is the pride of the citizens in this relic that they have given it the prominent position on their coat-of-arms. The special services in honour of the relic are specially interesting and include a prayer to the Empress Helena and a litany of the Holy Coat :—

“That Thou mayest bestow eternal peace upon all who gaze reverently upon Thy Holy Coat and pay honour to It: we beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.

“That Thou mayest cover us with the Coat of Innocence before death: we beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.

“That Thou mayest bestow upon us the Coat of Happiness after death: we beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE CHURCH OF SERVIA

IN writing for intelligent readers I need not, of course, insist upon the notorious delusion that the Orthodox Church is Greek. The Greek Church is merely one branch of it, and the Servian Church, which I have had occasion to study carefully, is another, just as the Anglican, Roman, and others are branches of the Catholic Church. Even more magnificently than Spain, Servia can boast of the absence of Dissenters. Over 98 per cent. of the population belong to the State Church, and as nearly 10 per cent. of the population are aliens, it is safe to say that the Servians in Servia are even more numerous ecclesiastically than politically.

The Romance of Religion

In my book on Servia I have dealt exhaustively with the Servian Church, but a few striking impressions may not be out of place in a work on the Romance of Religion.

I will describe a wedding, which I was privileged to attend. The bridegroom was a promising statesman, who, I regret to hear, has since been sent to penal servitude for high treason. There are many picturesque ceremonies in the Orthodox Ritual, but that of marriage is perhaps the most bizarre of them all. The principal personage is the *dever*, a kind of best man, who carries a big bouquet and must not leave the bride for an instant all day. There are no bridesmaids, but their place is taken by two kums, one for each family. That of *kum* is a hereditary relationship, involving the office of godfather at every christening and the sanction of every wedding.

The bride and bridegroom entered, accompanied by their kums, and the pope appeared at the entrance to the screen, which veils the sanctuary. He took the ring and made the sign of the cross with it in

The Church of Servia

the air before handing it to the bridegroom to be placed on the bride's finger. Then they all repaired to a little table, which had been placed in the centre of the church, the bride and bridegroom and kums each carrying a long, lighted candle. After various prayers and exhortations the kums each presented the bride with a dress length of silk, which remained suspended over the clasped hands of the happy pair for a long time. Then the pope took up a silver crown from the table, held it out to be kissed by the bridegroom, made the sign of the cross with it over the bridegroom's body, and finally placed it on his head. A similar ceremony was observed with another crown, which was by no means easy to arrange amid the edifice of combs and flowers upon the bride's head. Incense was lighted and a sort of minuet took place round the table. Then a cup of wine was handed in turn to the bridegroom, bride, and kums. The *dever* was summoned and entrusted with the cup, which he proceeded to offer to all the unmarried ladies present. There was a good deal of chaff about the acceptance of this, as

The Romance of Religion

a sip is supposed to imply marriage within the year. The crowns were then removed and the bride went round the church embracing all her friends of her own sex. What struck me most was the conduct of the congregation, who conversed and chaffed with as little false shame as though they were in a ball-room. There was nothing irreverent about it, but simply an evidence of the different notions entertained by different races on the subject of propriety in church.

I have also seen many funerals in Servia, and I was impressed by the appropriate melancholy of the soft Oriental music. Only a few people wore mourning, and the acolytes at the head of the procession were clad in bright scarlet cassocks. It is usual to carry the corpse in an open coffin, and there always seems to me something peculiarly dreadful in the sight of a dead face staring up from among a mountain of flowers. I remember a similar sight on the occasion of the funeral of the Patriarch of Venice, and suppose that the Venetians derive this usage, with many others, from the East.

The Church of Servia

Before the actual burial it is the custom in Servia for the relatives to bend down and press a final kiss upon the brow of the deceased. Funeral baked meats, a sort of pudding in a bowl, are carried before the coffin in procession and distributed to the congregation in church.

Another Servian ceremony, which is now dying out, is that of *pobratim*, or blood brotherhood. This is hallowed by a religious ceremony, in which the contracting parties eat bread and salt together, drink wine and a few drops of their own blood out of the same glass, and embrace as brothers. The new relationship is recognised by the laws and has a testamentary effect, but not, I believe, that of preventing marriage between the families of the contracting parties, though the marriage laws of Servia are exceedingly strict. A Servian may not marry into the family of his godfather, but that of his blood brother is still open to him. This new relationship was generally undertaken when two friends were on the point of setting out to the wars together. In recent

The Romance of Religion

years an important legal question was raised by the action of a Frenchman who contracted *pobra-tim* with a Servian in order to evade the French law, which compelled him to leave the bulk of his property to his real brother, whom he hated. In the end the French brother won his case, and the plot failed, but between Servians it would have been perfectly successful.

I had many interesting experiences in Servian monasteries, which now seem to be falling into decay. In many monasteries I found no monks except the Archimandrite and one novice. These, however, suffice to keep up the old traditions and to administer the monastic property. The buildings and gardens are delightfully mediæval. There are tangled vine branches, tall hollyhocks, and wild roses almost smothering the long, worm-eaten wooden benches, which stretch away beneath flowering horse-chestnuts, and magnificent peacocks convey an impression of old-world magnificence. The Archimandrites are the souls of hospitality. The oldest wine was produced and

The Church of Servia

excellent banquets were prepared wherever I went. "We have a saying in Servia," one dear old man remarked to me, "that guests are always welcome because they afford us an excuse for enjoying good fare also." After each meal we always had elaborate speech-making, and I never failed to elicit warm approval when I dwelt upon the sympathetic sentiments which unite the Anglican and Orthodox Churches. In this connection it is interesting to note that Anglican priests, travelling in Servia, have been invited to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist.

At one monastery I was fortunate enough to be present at the great annual festival of its saint. Very early in the morning I was awakened by the sound of a wooden board being beaten at the door of the church. This is called a *klepalo* and dates back to Turkish days, when Christians were forbidden to use bells to summon people to church. Crowds of peasants from the whole countryside quickly assembled, dressed in their finest holiday attire, and each carrying a sprig of

The Romance of Religion

basilica—a plant which possesses some religious association. There was a very long service in church, and the congregation spent most of its time lounging about, gossiping, and making offerings of tapers, which were lighted and stuck upon a big metal stand near the screen. The curious feature of this festival was that it embraced the obligation of fasting. There was a brisk trade outside in a kind of unleavened cake, which was the only food allowed during the day. This, however, did not affect the gaiety of the proceedings; singing and the dancing of the *kolo* went on without intermission all day. There is no instrumental music in a Servian church, but the singing is very sweet, and the incessant refrain of "*Gospodi pomilui*" (Lord, have mercy upon us!) will always linger in my memory.

I became acquainted with a great number of popes during my travels in Servia, and was deeply impressed by the affection they inspire and the authority they possess with their congregations. They spring from the people, and, not

The Church of Servia

being compelled to celibacy, run no risk of developing into a separate caste. Nearly all of them were very good fellows, and some of them bore reputations which would surprise us at home. I remember one who always wore a couple of enormous revolvers tucked into the broad blue silk girdle outside his cassock. The first time I saw him I found him engaged in sharpening a peculiarly murderous-looking sword-stick. He was an ardent patriot, and had come into frequent conflict with the Austrian frontier authorities. As they had refused him a passport to visit the members of his flock residing in Bosnia, he took to swimming the river with a revolver in his mouth, and his clerical attire held up with one hand in a bundle over his head. The gendarmes were afraid of the scandal that would be caused if they had fired upon him, so in the end he had his way.

Some of the *popadie*, or popes' wives, are also strange characters. I remember one, whose moral reputation was above suspicion, but who

The Romance of Religion

possessed few rivals in a carouse. She would break glasses and bottles, stand on the table, and sing in tones that would almost reach the next village, and dance or drink any man silly. Yet she had never been known to lose her head.

The Servian popes are not steeped in book learning, but they possess what is far more important, plenty of common sense, and they are looked upon as the natural leaders of the people. At times of national danger they have been known to lead their flocks in guerilla warfare, and in times of peace they act as ready-made arbitrators for any disputes which may arise. The fact that they have never abused their influence for their own purposes is sufficient testimony to the justice of the confidence which has been reposed in them, and it would be well if every priesthood in other countries could acquire as high a reputation as theirs.

CHAPTER XXII

EASTER IN BULGARIA

THE great square at Sofia just after midnight on Easter morning was like a scene in fairyland. The cathedral stood out white and ghostlike in the starlight, while all around, as far as the eye could stretch, were thousands of the orthodox holding lighted tapers which burned bravely in the windless night. Bells pealed everywhere ; cannon boomed, and people greeted one another in the approved dialogue : " Christ is risen,"—" He is risen indeed." Inside the cathedral all was dark, save where, above the door, at one window, a single candle flickered disconsolate. A long procession filed round the

The Romance of Religion

church; priests in gorgeous vestments, with gilt tiaras, swinging censers; monks from Rilo Monastery, acolytes in red and green, officers in full dress uniforms, and burghers in their best. Up the steps they swept; but the great door was fast closed. The Patriarch advanced and struck it with his foot. At once a great roar burst forth from the choir behind him: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in." Then from the solitary lighted window came the challenge, piped out in a treble voice of singular sweetness, "Who is the King of Glory—who is the King of Glory?" The refrains alternated for some minutes—the crowd respectfully silent and uncovered—then the great door burst open, the cathedral became suddenly a blaze of light, and the procession poured inside. A large crowd followed, to stand through the service for the next two hours. Those who were wiser in their generation preferred to return home and eat the seasonable cakes and hard-boiled eggs—a

Easter in Bulgaria

welcome feast after the long weeks of abstinence of the Orthodox Church. For the next half-hour, little groups carried lighted tapers, and companies of soldiers tramped back to barracks chaunting the wild strains of the Bulgarian National March.

Numbers remained outside the cathedral during the better half of the long service. It is considered in Eastern countries almost as pious to attend a service outside a church as inside. I have often noticed, even when a church was not particularly crowded, that a large part of the congregation would lounge about in the gallery during the greater part of the service. They would occasionally stroll in to see what was going on and then go out again in the most natural way in the world. This is rendered less unreasonable by the fact that part of the service, including the sermon, is often gone through on the verandah of the church for the benefit of those outside. Besides, the services of the Orthodox Church are so unconscionably long that I

The Romance of Religion

would defy anybody to make a practice of sitting right through them.

For those who had attended the long service in the cathedral a reception at the palace in the small hours was convenient; to those who had not, it presented the charms of novelty and originality. The guests present included the Ministry, the Greek and Roumanian Diplomatic Agents, a large number of officers, and a sprinkling of Englishmen. Proceedings opened with a speech, in his best Bulgarian, from Prince Ferdinand, who wished his guests the appropriate compliments of the season. After the cheering had subsided, two great baskets were brought in containing coloured hens' eggs marked with the Prince's crown and monogram (the letter Φ) in gold. All present then filed past. The Prince held out his hand with an egg in it, the guest took the hand, kissed it, and came away with the egg. He then passed on and received another egg in the same manner from his Royal Highness's mother, the Princess Clementine. The

Easter in Bulgaria

Bulgarians are not very expert in matters of Court ceremonial, and there were not a few humorous incidents during the distribution of eggs. One was dropped by a nervous officer and scrambled for at the Princess's feet in a really ludicrous manner. The ceremony was followed by music and supper, and the last guests did not leave the palace until half-past four in the morning. This formal bestowal of coloured eggs on Easter morning is universally practised by the fathers of Bulgarian families, and the Prince in adopting it sets forth the old-world claim of the Sovereign to be the father of his people.

At two o'clock in the afternoon there was another long service in the cathedral, at which Prince Ferdinand was present in state. The chief feature of the ritual was the delivery of the Gospel in thirteen languages—a literal interpretation of the injunction to "preach the Gospel unto all nations." This is done in every Orthodox church in Bulgaria on Easter Sunday, the Turkish and Western versions being printed, like the rest,

The Romance of Religion

in Cyrillic characters for the convenience of the popes. The French version at the cathedral was especially whimsical—read without emphasis, punctuation, or understanding—and even the Prince was obliged to relax for a moment the anxious gravity of his face. To many Englishmen present the English version was far and away the least intelligible, not excepting even that in Church Slaav—a language no one understands, scarcely even the clergy. The Prince sat in an elaborately carved throne, holding an untidy candle throughout the ceremony; the Princess and all the Court, gorgeous kavasses, aides-de-camp, and guards remained standing for the whole two hours.

The Easter holiday at Sofia extends over a full week, during which even the tobacconists keep up their shutters, and the hotel porters sink into a condition of drunken ineptitude. As is natural after the severe fasting which the Orthodox Church enforces, Easter-tide is mainly celebrated by intemperance, as well in eating as in drinking. A man will think nothing of eating forty or fifty

Easter in Bulgaria

hard-boiled eggs in the course of a day, and is consequently left with little inclination for any active pleasure afterwards. In the villages the *choro* is danced with vigour. The peasants, in their bright embroidered costume and barbaric ornaments, join hands in circle and move backwards and forwards, at first demurely, at minuet pace, then gradually faster and faster until there is quite a semblance of excitement and enjoyment that is foreign to the stolid Bulgarian character. As among Italian peasants, it is not considered proper for the sexes to dance together, so one segment of the circle is entirely composed of men and the other of women. The step of the *choro* is not unlike the heel-and-toe movement with which the heroes of "the halls" have made us familiar. The Friday in Easter week, which marks the close of the festivities, is celebrated with especial zeal. On the Saturday the shops begin to reopen in a reluctant, blinking, dissipated manner, and Sofia resumes her everyday humdrum appearance by degrees.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RELIGIOUS DANCE OF ETHIOPIA

IN my second chapter, on The Dance of the Seises in Seville Cathedral, I have alluded to the various uses of dancing as a religious exercise. Perhaps there is no country where it has survived with more of its old barbaric magnificence than in the Christian Empire of Ethiopia. My book on Abyssinia deals in detail with the whole Coptic ritual as I saw it in that country, but an account of the Romance of Religion would be incomplete without a reference to the dance of the priests, which I was privileged to behold at Trinity Church, Addis Ababa, which the Emperor Menelik often visits for his devotions.

The Religious Dance of Ethiopia

Like most Ethiopian churches, it is circular in shape and stands in a grove of trees surrounded by a high wall. Mules and Muhammdans are left outside, and the congregation reverently kisses the steps and lintels of the outer door of the wall before entering the grove. Here they strut along with as many servants as they can muster and an imposing array of long guns, spears, and curved swords in red scabbards. Fully half seat themselves in rows under the trees and give themselves over to meditation or conversation, while their children play at touch or hide-and-seek.

The interior is composed of three parts. Inside is the sanctuary, or holy of holies, where the priests alone are allowed to enter. Here the Ark of the Covenant and a few sacred books are kept and the more serious part of the service goes on, concealed from the congregation. Round the walls of the sanctuary are a great number of pictures, quaint examples of Ethiopian art and gaudy chromo-lithographs from Europe. The

The Romance of Religion

rest of the church consists of an inner and an outer circular passage divided by a wall with doors and windows in it. In these passages the congregation stand or lounge during the two or three hours of service very early on Sunday morning. The walls are of the roughest description, of irregular stones plastered with cowdung with an occasional scrap of ragged chintz hanging loosely upon them. On the floors is some very ragged, muddy straw matting.

After a buzzing chaunt has gone on inside for an hour or so, some twenty priests begin to assemble in the outer passage and form two rows facing each other. Their vestments consist for the most part of brown blankets and high, white turbans or the national *shamma*, a dingy-white cloak with a broad scarlet band. Long crutches are in the hands of each priest. These are a special ecclesiastical symbol, about the length of the native spear and fitted with a brass knob or carved ivory handle. A small boy clad in a bit of sacking is pushed forward into the doorway of

The Religious Dance of Ethiopia

the inner corridor and gabbles something in a very low tone out of a book. When he has finished, another small boy takes his place and goes through the same process. Can it be the Epistle and Gospel?

Then a gymnastic exercise begins. One priest acts as conductor and the others imitate his movements, all singing loudly through their noses. Why is it that a nasal intonation has so persistently been associated with religious elocution in all countries and creeds?

The crutches are held in the middle and darted at the ground, now near, now far, with a forward movement made by slightly bending the right knee. It is as though the priests were trying to tease a snake curled up on the floor. Then the crutches are lifted a foot into the air, crook end up, they are poised, they are swung to the right and to the left and again darted at the matting. The exercise grows faster and faster, the priests nod their heads with increasing violence and their chaunts grow ever louder. I am reminded of the

The Romance of Religion

dervishes at Constantinople. All of a sudden the whole exercise stops without any warning whatever.

Then there seems to be a kind of interlude and the priests take rest, reclining against the walls, whispering to one another or exchanging salutations with members of the congregation. Meanwhile I can see through a window that another priest is standing under a tree and delivering a homily to a small knot of people who are standing or sitting cross-legged around him.

After half an hour or so rattles are distributed to the priests. Some are handsome-looking instruments, others mere contrivances of tin and wire. The shape is that of a thick tuning-fork and inside it a couple of wires strung with a few discs like coins. The handle is jerked slightly and carelessly to and fro so that the discs jingle, while singing goes on and some big drums on the floor are beaten drowsily with the hand. The rattles are not shaken in time as the crutches

The Religious Dance of Ethiopia

were, but anyhow, at each priest's sweet will, as though the only object were to make as much noise as possible. Then all of a sudden the whole business ceases abruptly and the service is at an end.

This is the feature of an Ethiopian service on an ordinary Sunday. On a great festival the dancing is much more elaborate. It is quieter and more stately, a sort of quadrille figure and minuet step. The priests advance in two sections, the first of which bows to the Emperor, if he be present, and withdraws to a certain distance; the second section does the same and the figure is re-formed. Two rows now face each other with a couple of priests at each end to form a square, the crutches are waved, rattles are rattled and every now and then all the performers pirouette on one foot. It is not ungraceful to look at, but it goes on so long that it is bound to become wearisome to the onlookers.

On the morning of the Epiphany I came upon a strange sight at a flat piece of ground near a

The Romance of Religion

river in the interior of Abyssinia. I observed an old man and one assistant laboriously engaged in collecting heavy stones and piling them together in a heap. I was wondering who he was, when I noticed that he carried a fly-whisk, made of a piece of wood and a horse's tail stained with henna. This I knew was one of the insignia of the priesthood, and I found that his Reverence was engaged in setting up an altar in honour of the festival. Here in the afternoon he would place a large cross and the people of the neighbourhood would join him in dancing and singing.

The Abyssinian priests are an amiable but ignorant set of men, and their creed is probably more largely composed of ancient superstitions than is that of any other Christian Church. Still, it is a very sturdy survival, and, even though some day the spread of civilisation may swallow up the Empire of Ethiopia, the day is likely to be far distant when the old religion will disappear or suffer modification.

CHAPTER XXIV

CEREMONIES AT CONSTANTINOPLE

THE chief sight of Constantinople, perhaps even of the world also, is the famous Mosque of S. Sophia. It was built, over thirteen centuries ago, as a Christian church, and seems not to have been altered much in the process of becoming a Mosque. The building itself is nearly a square, being 235 by 250 feet. The dome is one foot less across than S. Paul's, but the effect of the interior is far greater—greater even than that of S. Peter's at Rome—chiefly, I suppose, because there are fewer carvings and ornaments to interfere with the range of the eye.

The Romance of Religion

Of the precious and wonderful things contained in it there is no end. There are columns of dark green marble, taken from the temple of Diana at Ephesus, and columns of dark red porphyry from the temple of the Sun at Baalbec. There is one of the prayer carpets of the Prophet, and Christ's cradle and basin brought there from Bethlehem. There is a sweating column, which emits moisture, supposed to effect wonderful cures. There are priceless carpets on the floor, thick and soft and beautiful, such as could not be bought or seen elsewhere.

The first impression on entering is one of bewilderment. You have come down a narrow passage to a mean doorway, where your guide has haggled about the price of admission. Unbelievers must pay from two to five shillings each to enter a mosque and, as these sums go to the church expenses, the priests exact as much as they can.

By rights the feet must be unshod on entering a mosque, but it is enough if you put on

Ceremonies at Constantinople

slippers over your footgear, unless you wear goloshes or boots which take off easily. Going about in a mosque with these slippers over your boots is an operation not unlike that of skating, for it is an affront to let the slipper fall off, which you risk doing every time you lift your foot. Turks wear their fezzes in mosque as they do in a house, but Christians are expected to take off their hats.

When at last you have passed under the thick, heavy curtain of the doorway you are almost overcome by the immensity of the place, the harmonious magnificence of its architecture, and the dim, religious light which streams in from the roof. Stray worshippers are standing or kneeling in various parts, but the most stalwart of them seem tiny mites, lost in the immensity of the building.

There are still many traces of Christianity in this as in other mosques, and the Greek guides are very fond of pointing out the figure of Christ, still distinct, over the place where the

The Romance of Religion

high altar would be. The fact is, the Muham-madans consider Christ a prophet, and have been at small pains to obliterate the paintings and mosaics in His honour.

In every mosque there is a row of steep steps, with two flags at the top. On high days the chief priest climbs up with a drawn sword in his hand and delivers a discourse. In the chief mosques there is a special raised seat standing on pillars for the Sultan.

The centre of a mosque is covered with oblong shapes of carpet, each long enough for a man to prostrate himself upon it. These oblongs are turned towards the direction of Mecca, which is not precisely the same as the east of the church, where the altar would be if there was one. Accordingly, when the congregation is praying, all are turned in a direction at a slight angle to the line of the church. This has a curious architectural effect, not ungraceful but unexpected, like some of the intentional monstrosities in Japanese ornaments.

Ceremonies at Constantinople

A Turk at prayer is at one moment standing bolt upright, then suddenly on his knees, and then suddenly prostrate, with his forehead touching the carpet. From this position he raises himself with a kind of acrobatic jerk, not otherwise than dignified. The sight of a mosque full of Turks, all rising and falling in perfect time, is distinctly striking. But the most striking sight of any that I saw at Constantinople was that of S. Sophia from the gallery during service on a high day.

The mosque was illuminated with 7,500 fairy lights, consuming 10,000 pounds of oil. These lights were arranged all round the dome and all along the edges of the gallery ; they were in clusters round the pillars and in flower-shaped chandeliers hung from the ceiling to within a few feet of the ground by invisible wires. The mystery and beauty of this scene, with a crowd of worshippers rising and falling harmoniously in the centre, baffles description. I shall not easily forget it as one of the most pleasing and

The Romance of Religion

solemn, as well as one of the most supremely religious, sights I have ever beheld. The Turks are above all a religious people, and there is a simplicity and solemnity about their religion which is wanting in many others.

The only unpleasant part about visiting a mosque is the fact, constantly obtruded, that you are very far from welcome. The priests admit you grudgingly, and the worshippers, whose devotions you disturb, scowl menacingly.

One of the strangest sights at Constantinople, which no wise traveller omits to see, is that of the whirling and howling dervishes. At first sight they appear very grotesque and tend to prejudice folk against the Muhammadan religion ; but, after all, their antics may not be much more grotesque than the practices of the fanatics of other religions seem to those unused to them. The dervishes are Muhammadan monks, whose whole lives are devoted to religion, and, if their practices strike us as unusual, we must at any rate give them credit for sincerity and self-sacrifice.



Dervishes.

[To face p. 296.]

Ceremonies at Constantinople

The howling dervishes are to be seen every Thursday at Scutari. The day I saw them I trod the soil of Asia for the first time, and the surroundings of the Asiatic suburb struck me as stranger and more Oriental than what I had seen in Constantinople itself.

The ceremony of the howling dervishes was also more distinctly Asiatic in its strangeness. The room where the ceremony took place was a square one with a gallery round three sides of it supported by pillars. One side of the gallery was covered with a screen, behind which the wives of the dervishes were said to be sitting. Under the gallery were seats for strangers to view the ceremony, and no one seemed to have any objection to the presence of infidels.

The chief of the dervishes stood with his back to the east, facing the others, some eighteen to twenty in number. They came up in single file to him and received a kind of blessing. The chief wore a flowing black gown, suggesting a Calvinist minister. The

The Romance of Religion

others wore similar gowns of blue and green stuff. Out of doors they wear brown felt sugar-loaf caps, but indoors they take these off, and some of them wear turbans, while others wear a kind of skull cap.

After the blessing, lengthy prayers and readings from the Koran took place. Then the dervishes stood in a row facing the east and divested themselves of their outer cloaks. Various gymnastic motions were gone through, the chief leading, and the others imitating him minutely. Then they all began to recite the ninety-nine names of the Prophet—a kind of litany which they accompanied with a rhythmical motion of their bodies.

First, they would bend forward to the right, as far as they could go without losing their balance, then they would swing themselves back on their left feet, and bend as far as was possible without either of their feet leaving the ground. Then they would rapidly change on to their right feet, swing themselves back to

Ceremonies at Constantinople

the right and forward to the left, and then begin again.

This motion went on for about half an hour, growing faster and faster, the recitation of the litany growing louder and louder. At last the words became indistinguishable and they indulged merely in a hoarse, wild cry, exactly like the growl of a wild beast. I am told they take opium before they begin this performance, and certainly they seemed to have entirely taken leave of their ordinary senses. Towards the end of the half-hour many of them were foaming at the mouth, and giving signs of utter exhaustion. In hot weather they often fall down in a kind of fit.

After the half-hour was over, the chief clapped his hands, and they were given a short rest, while ordinary prayers were said. The chief, being an old man, had only gone through the motions of the others very formally, scarcely doing more than nod. The others varied in their vehemence according to their strength and

The Romance of Religion

piety. When the chief thought they had rested sufficiently, he gave the signal for beginning again.

This time the row of dervishes began by turning their heads to the right, so that the mouth of one came near the left ear of his neighbour. Then they all turned to the left in the same way, and turned and turned again with ever-increasing rapidity. They recited the ninety-nine names of the Prophet as they did so.

It seemed to me like a game, in which each dervish was trying to sneeze in his neighbour's face, for as soon as he had exposed his face to his right-hand neighbour, he drew it away rapidly and growled at his left-hand neighbour. All the time they kept up a springing motion with their heels and toes, and every now and then it sounded exactly as if they were saying "Tra-la-la" very solemnly. With the best will in the world, it was difficult to keep a solemn countenance all through the service.

After another half-hour the dervishes were

Ceremonies at Constantinople

stopped again, and an attendant brought a tin of honey and a little flask of water to the chief dervish. He made a motion of offering it up to the east, partook of a little, and gave the refreshments back to the attendant to be offered to the rest of the performers.

The afternoon wound up with another strange ceremony. A number of children were brought in. The chief priest stood with his back to the east, and the children lay down flat on their stomachs in front of him, by ones and twos and threes. Some of them were only three or four years old, and none more than ten or twelve. They were of both sexes.

As they lay there, the priest came and stood upon their backs for the space of about two minutes. When more than one lay there side by side, he would step from the back of one on to the back of another, and afterwards walk back very slowly over their bodies. Then he bent down and blew upon them before they were allowed to get up. One little girl thought she

The Romance of Religion

had had enough of it when he got off her back, and tried to get up before she had been blown upon. But she was made to lie down again, and he stood on her back once more.

I understood that these children were being dedicated to the religious service. I expressed my wonder that they were not hurt by being trampled on in this way, but I was told that some of the dervishes in distant parts of the East actually stand on horseback on the bodies of men, women, and children.

The dancing or whirling dervishes are at Pera, within a stone's throw of the hotels. They perform in a circular room with a gallery all round it. The floor is of polished wood, like a ball-room. In one part of the gallery there are musicians, who play on primeval instruments, which seem to have only about one note. One man bangs away at a kind of tom-tom, and another makes most hideous grimaces in the process of extracting sound from a kind of long flute. If I had ever seen a monkey sucking a

Ceremonies at Constantinople

sugar-stick, I am sure it would have been like that man.

Below there are thirty-two dervishes in flowing blue and green robes, with very wide skirts. After ordinary prayers they take off their outer garments and their shoes and walk in a slow procession three times round the room. Then the last one, as he reaches the starting-point, turns round and bows to the first one, who is following him closely. After his bow he begins whirling, and the first one steps into his place, turns round, bows to the second one, and begins whirling. This they all do in turns with the exception of their chief.

Soon the whole room is full of whirling dervishes. They stand with their arms outstretched, and spin round and round with a waltz step, always in the same direction. Some go quite slowly and demurely; others spin so rapidly that their skirts stand right out like crinolines, and you cannot distinguish their faces or count their arms. The sight was quite bewildering, but

The Romance of Religion

none of them seemed to feel any inconvenience all the time they were whirling. They had three bouts of twenty minutes each, with a short interval between. I am told that sometimes they go to sleep while they are spinning in this way.